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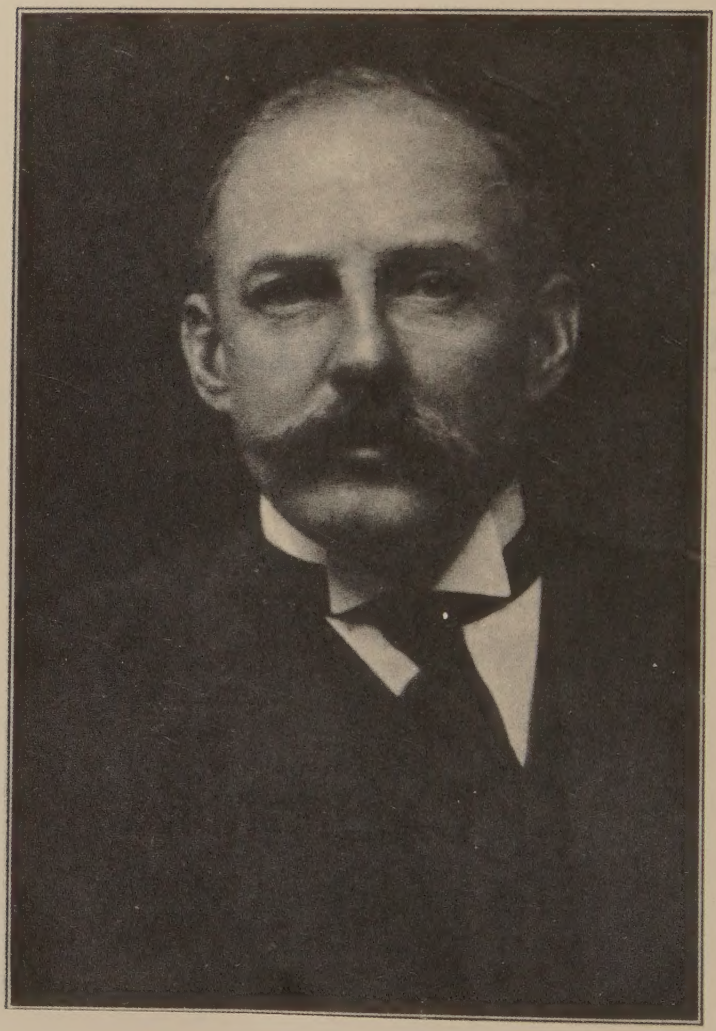
SOME AMERICAN STORY TELLERS



FRANCIS MARION CRAWFORD

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SOME AMERICAN STORY TELLERS

BY

FREDERIC TABER COOPER

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To the

STORY TELLERS OF AMERICA

Both Those Whom the Author Has Been
Privileged to Know Personally and Those Whom He
Has Met Only Through the Medium of the Printed Page,

THE PRESENT VOLUME

is Herewith Dedicated in
Grateful Recognition of Many
Pleasant Hours

PREFACE

The term "Story Tellers" has been deliberately chosen for this volume in place of "Novelists," or "Story Writers," or any other available variant, because it makes possible a more uniform manner of treatment and a more generous point of view. While it is true that the modern novel in its higher development has come to mean something more important than a mere story, a source of amusement for an idle hour; still the fact remains that in all classes and grades of fiction the underlying story is the one common factor, the one indispensable element, without which the most carefully written novel becomes a mere dry-as-dust essay or sermon.

Now, the ability to tell a story is precisely the one gift that cannot be taught. The late Frank Norris once wrote that in every child a story teller was born, but that the vast majority died soon after birth. This, of course, is only a figurative way of saying that the imaginative faculty is a prerogative of childhood; that successful story telling, where it survives to mature years, is an intuitive, inborn quality not to be acquired by any

amount of conscious cerebration. The subjects of the essays included in this volume differ widely in aim and in accomplishment; but all of them possess, to a considerable extent, the gift that makes them next of kin to the minstrel and troubadour, to the ancient fabulist, and to the forgotten spinner of the world's first nursery tales,—the gift of holding the attention by the spell of the spoken word.

Indiscriminate praise is, of course, as foolish and as harmful as wholesale censure. Yet it is more helpful to discover some merit lurking in an otherwise mediocre volume, than to dismiss it contemptuously because its shortcomings are all upon the surface. Some very large oysters contain some very small pearls; but that is no reason for disdainfully tossing the oysters aside, with the remark: "Those pearls are not worth the trouble of saving; see the amount of waste shell there is!" Now, all of the authors herein treated contain pearls, some large and some small; and the attempt has been made in each case to find and indicate them. The intention has been, not to ignore or gloss over any faults, but first of all to lay the main emphasis upon the positive merits; to show a sympathetic understanding of what each author has tried to do, and to give full credit wherever they have succeeded in their attempt. And the highest and best reward that has yet come or that

can come is in those cases where the subjects of these essays voluntarily say: "You have understood."

A few essays are here printed for the first time; others have been extensively rewritten, in order to bring them up to date. But the majority, in one form or another, appeared originally in the pages of the *Bookman;* and the author wishes to express his appreciation of the courtesy of the editor and publishers of that magazine, in allowing them to be reprinted.

FREDERIC TABER COOPER.

NEW YORK CITY,
June 26, 1911.

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FRANCIS MARION CRAWFORD

THERE is a peculiar satisfaction in undertaking a critical study of Mr. Marion Crawford in a volume which by its very title avows the intention of viewing the novelist primarily in his capacity of story teller. While it is quite true that an interesting plot is the indispensable corner-stone of successful fiction, yet many of the biggest novels are not those in which the story teller's art has reached its highest development—they are big because they are not only stories, but a great deal else besides: fearless paintings of existing conditions; trenchant criticisms of life. And conversely, many a novel faulty in structure, false in coloring, exaggerated in action to the point of melodrama, has been vitalized by that magic instinct of the born story teller, that inimitable gift of making miracles seem plausible, and convincing you that impossibilities could have happened, simply by telling you with assured audacity that they really did happen. Consequently, to approach a novelist primarily on the story-telling side is neither a direct road to discovering his perma-

nent place in fiction nor a barrier to such discovery. It simply determines the initial point of view, avoids the trouble of many explanations and saving clauses, and often makes possible a greater indulgence for shortcomings, a more cordial recognition of merit. In the case of Mr. Crawford the advantages of this standpoint are sufficiently obvious. Whatever position may be assigned to him now or hereafter in English letters, it must be conceded that he was first, last and always a prince of story tellers, whose title was inborn and not acquired. A little more than a quarter of a century ago, when *Mr. Isaacs* caught the attention of a volatile reading public, there were those who predicted, in view of its oddity of theme and treatment, that the newly discovered author would never again repeat his initial success, that Mr. Crawford would remain in the class of authors of one book. Yet any one with a well-developed critical sense must have seen in *Mr. Isaacs*, beneath its Oriental coloring and its mystical atmosphere, the first flowing of that strong, steady, inexhaustible current of narration which has held its even way through upward of twoscore volumes, not one of which deserves the stigma of mediocrity, while just a few possess a quality entitling them to a higher recognition than they have yet received.

There is yet another reason for preferring to

treat of Mr. Crawford primarily as a story teller: namely, that it is the point of view from which he himself would have chosen to be treated. The first axiom of all impartial and helpful criticism is that an author's work should be judged in the light of what he has intended to do. Most novelists of real importance have sooner or later expressed in print their theories of the art they practised, but few have done so with the terse clearness, the uncompromising conviction that characterize Mr. Crawford's suggestive little monograph upon *The Novel—What It Is.* To the critic it is a most helpful little volume, not for a better understanding of what constitutes a novel—since there are a score of points on which one is inclined to take issue with the author—but for a better understanding of Mr. Crawford himself. Indeed, it is scarcely too much to say that it is a convenient key to every one of his merits and defects. And for that reason it seems wise to examine it somewhat carefully, to quote from it rather freely, and to get quite clearly before us just what are his theories of fiction and why those theories do not always bear the fruit which he expected to obtain from them.

In the first place, then, the novel is defined by Mr. Crawford as a "marketable commodity," of the class collectively termed "intellectual artistic luxuries." In other words, the first object

of the novel is "to amuse and interest the reader," and a novelist is at all times under an implied contract with the prospective purchasers to give them the entertainment they are looking for and to attempt nothing more serious than entertainment. It is not surprising, therefore, that he has no tolerance whatever for the purpose novel, not merely because "in art of all kinds the moral lesson is a mistake," but for the more specific reason that the purpose novel is "a simple fraud, . . . an odious attempt to lecture people who hate lectures, to preach at people who prefer their own church, and to teach people who think they know enough already." The novel is nothing more nor less than "a pocket theater," the novelist nothing more than a "public amuser."

It is good to make people laugh ; it is sometimes salutary to make them shed tears ; it is best of all to make our readers think—not too serious thoughts, nor such as require an intimate knowledge of science and philosophy to be called thoughts at all—but to think, and, thinking, to see before them characters whom they might really like to resemble, acting in scenes in which they themselves would like to take part.

Mr. Crawford need not have added to the above paragraph a single word regarding his attitude toward romance and realism; for it is

obvious that the novelist who recognizes that his chief duty is to entertain, and who deliberately purposes to leave out of his books all characters whom his readers would not like to resemble and all scenes in which his readers would not care to play a part, must of necessity have scant sympathy for the realistic school, or small use for the definition of the novel as "a cross-section of life." What he does have to say upon this subject is exactly in accord with what one would expect him to say. Zola he concedes somewhat reluctantly to have been a great man, "mightily coarse to no purpose, but great, nevertheless, a Nero of fiction." But "Zola's shadow, seen through the veil of the English realistic novel, is a monstrosity not to be tolerated." The fact that "in our Anglo-Saxon system the young girl is everywhere" seems to him in itself a sufficient reason why we should "temper the wind of our realism to the sensitive innocence of the ubiquitous shorn lamb." And after defining the realistic school as that which "purposes to show men what they are," and the romantic school as the one which "tries to show men what they should be," he frankly declares that for his part he believes that "more good can be done by showing men what they may be, ought to be, or can be than by describing their greatest weaknesses with the highest art."

There is just one more paragraph which deserves to be emphasized, because it touches quite unconsciously upon the source of the real weakness not only of Mr. Crawford's novels, but of the romantic school as a whole:

> Practically, what we call a romantic life is one full of romantic incidents which come unsought, as the natural consequence and result of a man's or a woman's character. It is therefore necessarily an exceptional life, and as such should have an exceptional interest for the majority.

Now there cannot be any question that the theory contained in this paragraph is admirable; the trouble is that as a working formula it almost never succeeds. Even in Mr. Crawford's own novels, admirable as they are—for he understands beyond question the technique of his craft—it would puzzle the critic to point out any one romantic life made up solely of incidents which have "come unsought, as the natural consequence and result of the man's character." The hidden flaw in all romantic fiction is due to the fact that the incidents which come unsought, as the result of character, rarely show the romantic quality which a Scott, a Dumas, a Stevenson demands. The novelist may take the greatest pains in his selection of exceptional types of men and women, and may show equal

care in bringing them together under exceptional conditions; nevertheless, in nine cases out of ten, if he leaves them alone to follow consistently their natural bent; if he does not actively intervene and force them to say "no" or to say "yes"; if he does not check and harass and complicate their actions by the intervention of blind, illogical fate in the shape of disaster, disease and death, he will find them naturally and quietly doing the normal and obvious thing, and frustrating his hope of providing that exceptional interest which is demanded by the majority. In *Mr. Isaacs*, perhaps quite as consistently as in any of his later books, Mr. Crawford evolved a long series of highly romantic happenings directly from the peculiar temperament of his hero; yet take away the element of chance—the accidental blow on the head received by Isaacs in the game of polo, the coincidence which made Miss Westonhaugh's brother the unknown benefactor of Isaacs in his days of poverty, and finally the girl's illness and death from jungle fever—and the story would necessarily have had a radically different and more prosaic ending. In *Saracinesca* and *Sant' Ilario*, the most admirably real of all Mr. Crawford's Italian stories, the fact remains that the vital issues of the plot arise, in the one case, out of a purely chance identity of names between two distant cousins, and in the other, from an almost

incredible series of coincidences—a lost pin, a stolen envelope, a forged letter. Now, in romantic fiction there is no logical objection to the use of chance, accident, fate, call it what you will. The mistake lies in trying to write romance in accordance with a realistic formula, and to convince the reader that sane men and women did strange, unlikely deeds as the direct result of their own characters.

Mr. Crawford, however, in a measure disarms criticism by confessing genially that he is himself "the last of literary sinners." His creed, so far as he has one, slips on and off easily, like a well-worn glove. In theory, as we have seen, he advocates romance; in practice he is in turn realist, psychologue, mystic, whatever for the moment suits his need or appeals to his instinct of born story teller. His stage-setting, his local color are painted in from life with scrupulous fidelity; a Balzac or a Zola could not be more faithful to reality in matters of topography. You may at any time, if you please, trace the peregrinations of Count Skariatine through the back alleys of Munich, or of Paul Patoff through the labyrinthine paths of Constantinople. And his people are as real as his streets and houses. The whole world knows that his Mr. Isaacs was drawn direct from life, the original being a certain Mr. Jacobs, a trader in rare jewels, who later came into note

through his dispute with the Nizam of Deccan over the price of the Great Empress diamond. Had you talked with Mr. Crawford about his other characters, you would have learned that there was nothing exceptional in the case of Mr. Isaacs. He would have told you with a quiet smile that the men and women who thronged the pages of his *Saracinesca* trilogy were all real people, whom he had for the most part known and liked well; that Corona was still living; that Spica was a composite portrait of a cadaverous Pole and a famous Neapolitan duelist, who died a few years ago; that Count Skariatine, the crazed nobleman in *A Cigarette Maker's Romance*, was in reality a German count, who once a week, just as in the story, left his work-bench in the little tobacco shop and sat at home waiting in vain for a summons to the Bavarian Court; that Vjera, the Russian girl who sold her hair to pay the count's debt of honor, was also a reality; and that even Fischlowitz's dingy tobacco shop, with the absurd mechanical figure of a Viennese *Gigerl* in the window, existed in Munich exactly as Mr. Crawford drew it, and was in fact the shop where he went day after day to buy his cigarettes.

His method, then, may be summed up somewhat after this fashion: he begins by taking a real stage-setting, some one of the many corners of the world of which his cosmopolitan experience has

given him intimate knowledge; he brings upon the stage a group of real people of strong and interesting personality, whom he has known and studied from the life, idealizing them to suit his purpose, yet not so much as to mar the illusion of reality. And having up to this point held himself in check, he now gives free rein to his imagination, and puts these thoroughly real people through a series of highly romantic adventures, forcing them to think and say and do many things which our sober second judgment tells us they never would have said or thought or done—and yet, with his inborn power of story telling, convincing us for the time being that it all must have happened exactly as he assures us that it did.

It would be futile to attempt to survey in detail any large number of Mr. Crawford's twoscore novels, nor would any very useful purpose be served were it practical to do so. There is a surprisingly large proportion of his books which a critic may quite safely ignore—books which one and all maintain an even quality of interest, yet add nothing to our estimate of him as man or artist. As is well-nigh inevitable in a novelist who never allows himself to forget that "novel writing is a business," and who has brought the technique of construction almost to a mechanical routine, the difference between his earlier and later books is mainly a loss of spontaneity and an increased

conventionality in plot and character. Mr. Crawford did not "write himself out," to use the phrase which he declared was so terrible for any author to hear. His average standard during his closing years was far nearer to that of his best work than that of Mr. Howells, let us say, comes to *Silas Lapham*—nearer, indeed, than many another novelist whom the world has chosen to honor could come to his own best achievement after a quarter of a century of unremittent toil. It is nevertheless a fact that the volumes which one feels inclined to single out for specific discussion all belong to the first decade of Mr. Crawford's literary activity.

Mr. Isaacs of course must remain one of the volumes which will be read as long as Mr. Crawford continues to be remembered. Crude though it may be in construction, and uneven in style, it nevertheless remains a rather remarkable achievement, one of those rare first efforts that are nothing short of a sheer stroke of genius. It is usually an unwise experiment to read over in maturity a story which gave keen pleasure in early youth; yet if the present writer may be allowed to cite his own personal experience, *Mr. Isaacs* is one of the books that stand the test surprisingly well. Mr. Crawford himself admitted that he was most fortunate in having begun his literary career with this particular book; theosophy was in the air, Kipling

had not yet pre-empted the field of India for fiction, and there was, moreover, a certain mingling of poetry and cynicism, of mature experience and youthful enthusiasm, that went well with the strange theme and the vivid coloring. And one may seriously question whether any single volume written by Marion Crawford in the height of his powers could have duplicated the success of *Mr. Isaacs* if put forth as the first novel of an unknown author.

Dr. Claudius, which followed *Mr. Isaacs* within the year, may well be passed over with the comment that for a book so badly handicapped the wonder was that it succeeded at all. As has very truly been said, "a learned Heidelberg Ph.D., however sentimental and yellow-bearded, is a less attractive conception than a youthful and pure-blooded Iranian adventurer, whose glowing eyes outshine his jewels." Yet but for the caprice of fate it might have been known to the world as Mr. Crawford's first book, for it had been in the hands of the publishers many months before *Mr. Isaacs* was issued. Of the books which followed, at an average rate of two volumes a year, *A Roman Singer* was notable for that extreme simplicity of style which has since become one of Mr. Crawford's most effective assets; *Marzio's Crucifix*, as representing a long step forward in the technique of unity of plot; *Kahled*, as the most

effective and artistic of all the author's purely fanciful efforts. But the volumes which it seems worth while to single out for more detailed comment are *The Three Fates*, *A Cigarette Maker's Romance* and the *Saracinesca* trilogy.

It is a curious and unexplained fact that when the topic of Mr. Crawford's novels comes up in a company of fairly well-read men and women, and they have all expressed a more or less intelligent opinion about *The Ralstons* and *Don Orsino* and *Fair Margaret*, if you then make mention of *The Three Fates* you are likely to find that no one present has read the book nor one in ten even heard of it. Yet it is easily the best of Mr. Crawford's New York stories; it is simply not in the same class with *Katharine Lauderdale* and *Marion Darche*. The people in it are all thoroughly alive; at times they tempt one to say that they are the most intensely alive of any characters Mr. Crawford has ever drawn. The principal figure is a young and struggling author making the rounds of New York publishing houses and striving to win a hearing for his first novel. It takes no very profound intuition to guess that there is a modicum of autobiography worked into the pages of *The Three Fates*, and its author makes no attempt to deny it. If Mr. Crawford was asked which of his American stories he personally liked best, this is the one that he was almost sure

to name,—adding with a reminiscent sigh of mingled satisfaction and regret, "The fact is, I put a great deal of myself into *The Three Fates.*"

The personal touch is, of course, an all-sufficient reason to explain the author's preference, but a critic's choice should rest on a sounder basis. And in this case such basis is to be found in the rather exceptional study it contains of some phases of love, where both the man and the woman are quite young. The emotions of mature men and women are comparatively easy to chronicle; they know life too well to jeopardize their happiness with imaginary woes. But the very young are prone to magnify their troubles and their grievances, to torture themselves over trivial faults and absurd scruples, which are, of course, for the time being as vital and momentous to them as profounder trials are to those of riper years. And the task of interpreting these youthful crises with sympathetic understanding and a touch of indulgent irony is one which just a few novelists successfully achieve. One recalls especially certain chapters in William Black's *Madcap Violet* and Mr. Howells's *April Hopes;* and to these may be added *The Three Fates.* As in several of Mr. Crawford's earlier volumes, the construction is faulty. There is no clear-cut central theme. The most that can be said for the plot is that the author has sought to show how a young man of

a keenly sensitive artistic temperament may, in those vital formative years when his life's career is just opening before him, find his ideals of womanhood so subtly and yet so radically modified that in a comparatively brief space he has been able to love tenderly and sincerely three different women, and to receive from each in turn a permanent impression, a modification of his character which time will only strengthen. And yet, as the first and the second successively withdraw themselves from his life, he knows that there can be no going back, even should they so elect; they have been very dear to him, they have each played the part of one of the Fates in his life, yet there is no resurrection for the emotions which are dead. And at the end of the story the man, sobered by sorrow and toil and hard-won achievement even more than by the sudden and unforeseen responsibility of great wealth, hesitates to put to the test the last of his three Fates. He knows that this time there is no question of a transitory passion, but rather the deep, lasting love of mature manhood; this third woman means so much in his life that even her friendship is a precious thing, which he fears to jeopardize by speaking prematurely. This dénouement of *The Three Fates* is one of the most artistic and felicitous single touches to be found in Mr. Crawford's writings. We know that the third and greatest

opportunity is merely deferred, not lost; yet the contrast between the boy's precipitancy and the man's delay is the best measure of the difference in kind as well as in degree between the earlier and the later love.

It is customary to regard the cycle of Italian novels, beginning with the *Saracinesca* trilogy and continued in *Corleone* and *Taquisara*, as the strongest and most finished work that the author of *A Roman Singer* has produced. This, however, is not the view held by those critics who have made the most careful study of his novels; nor is it the view held by Mr. Crawford himself. Indeed, he has sometimes expressed a doubt whether on the whole his Italian stories have not been more of a detriment to him than a help. The public seemed to expect them of him, he explains, and so confined his activity to that particular field when he would much rather have directed it elsewhere. Of these Italian books as a whole it may be said that they have at least the merit of presenting to English readers a comprehensive picture of social life in Italy such as cannot be found elsewhere in English fiction. The fact that Mr. Crawford was born in Rome and spent much of his early life there, and that later he deliberately elected to make Italy his permanent home, placed him in a position to write from the standpoint of a native. In fact, he is on firmer ground

and writes with a more assured knowledge when the scene is laid in Rome than when the action takes place in Boston or New York. Nevertheless, while they are his most ambitious efforts, even the best of them, even *Saracinesca* and *Sant' Ilario*, have not the artistic charm and unity possessed by several slighter works. And the reason is not hard to find. *Saracinesca* and its sequels belong to the type best defined as the Epic Novel, the type wherein a great social movement, a moral or political revolution drawing to a climax, serves as the background of the story, while the destiny of some special group, some single family, some individual man or woman, closely interwoven with the progress of the general movement, forms the central thread of the plot, the focus of interest. At first sight *Saracinesca* seems to fulfil the conditions of the Epic Novel. The setting is Rome, on the eve of the downfall of the Pope's temporal power and the achievement of a united Italy; and the central thread concerns itself with the fortunes of a single family, the Saracinesca, proud, conservative, loyal adherents of the Church. Yet when we study the book's construction a little closer we realize that the relation between the general and the specific theme is of the most perfunctory sort. The historical background is admirable as a piece of verbal painting; it shows on the surface the days of careful

study which its author acknowledges that he wrought into its construction. But it fails to be, properly speaking, an Epic Novel, because there is no close and necessary connection between the historical movement then going on in Italy and the private drama of the Saracinesca family. Take any one of the big, unmistakably epic novels, whether it be *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or Zola's *L'Assommoir*, the epic of slavery or of intemperance; you will find the central theme inseparably interwoven with the general—the fate of Uncle Tom symbolic of the slave system, the fate of Gervaise symbolic of the demon of alcohol. In *Saracinesca* and *Sant' Ilario* there is no such close connection, no central symbol; nor did Mr. Crawford intend that there should be. For the symbolic novel is next of kin to the purpose novel; it teaches and preaches and does other kindred things which conflict with the creed which Mr. Crawford professed. Nevertheless, oddly enough, *Don Orsino*, much inferior to its predecessors in human interest, is in point of structure much more logical and correct. In fact, it may be called an epic of the era of disastrous building speculation in Rome; and the fact that Don Orsino's fortunes were closely entangled in the general panic which resulted gives us the connection between the general and the special *motif* which this type of novel demands.

In point of form, however, Mr. Crawford has never done anything more perfect than *A Cigarette Maker's Romance.* In dimensions it is a rather long novelette; in structure it obeys the rules of the short story rather than those of the novel. It contains no superfluous character or incident, and its time of action is confined within a space of thirty-six hours. It seems worth while, even at the risk of repeating what must already be familiar to a majority of Mr. Crawford's readers, to run over briefly the substance of this little masterpiece. Count Skariatine, a Russian of noble birth who has quarreled with his father and has been disowned, is eking out a pitiful living by rolling cigarettes for a thrifty Munich tobacconist. Disappointment and privation have so preyed upon his mind that he has become affected with a periodic delusion that a letter has come from Russia restoring him to his lost position and that messengers from his family will visit him on the morrow. Once a week, under the spell of this delusion, he absents himself from the tobacco shop and waits in confidence all day, only to awaken, when the clock tolls midnight, to a shuddering realization of his abnormal condition. On the particular night when the story opens Count Skariatine's periodic delusion is just coming upon him. Once again he tells his employer the familiar story of the letter from Russia, the friends

who will come to-morrow, the necessity of his bidding the tobacconist good-by. The tobacconist's wife, who refuses to believe any part of the count's story, or even that he is a count at all, rudely breaks in upon him with a claim for money, the value of a stolen mechanical figure, a Viennese *Gigerl*, for the loss of which the count is in reality not responsible. Incensed, however, by the woman's attitude and relying upon the visionary fortune which he expects upon the morrow, Count Skariatine rashly gives his word of honor that the value of the *Gigerl* shall be paid within twenty-four hours. The next day runs its usual course, and the evening finds the count slowly struggling to a consciousness that not only have his friends failed to come, but that he has pledged his honor to pay a sum of money which he does not possess, and has no hope of raising in time, and that he is not willing to live dishonored. The rest of the story tells how Vjera, the humble Russian girl who day after day has rolled cigarettes side by side with the count and learned to love him with dumb hopelessness, discovers his desperate need and comes to his aid; how the count, under the spell of his temporary insanity, declares his love for her and makes extravagant promises of the wonderful things he will do for her as soon as his estates are restored to him; how she raises the money needed to save his honor, and how

finally, when on the morrow the count returns as usual to his bench, and the friends he has so long awaited actually do arrive and bring him word that he is sole heir to his father's wealth, he presents to them the humble little cigarette-maker as the future Countess Skariatine:

> I had contracted a debt of honor, and I had nothing wherewith to pay it. There was but an hour left —an hour, and then my life and my honor would have gone together. . . . She saved me, gentlemen; she cut off her beautiful hair from her head and sold it for me. But that is not the reason why she is to be my wife. There is a better reason than that. I love her, gentlemen, with all my heart and soul, and she has told me that she loves me.

It is in passages such as this that we get the key to Mr. Crawford's perennial hold upon the hearts of his readers. His real strength lies not in his mastery of technique or his originality of plot, but in his ability to picture for us honest gentlemen and noble women, whom we are the better for having known if only through the medium of the printed page. If there is room for choice, his men are better than his women, more finely drawn, with subtler understanding. There is a long list of them whom you cannot forget even if you would—even in *Saracinesca* alone

there are a whole group whom it is a joy to remember: old Saracinesca, with his chronic fondness for quarreling with his well-loved son; the melancholy Spica, whose fame in duels made him a *memento mori* wherever he went; even Astrardente, the worn-out old dandy, shows at the last certain fine instincts which make us glad of the privilege of having known him. It is doubtful whether any of the novelists who are writing today have given the world so many characters whom the average reader will remember with pleasure and years afterward recall by name.

What place will be ultimately assigned to Mr. Crawford in the history of fiction it is somewhat early to predict. Excepting as a conservative force, it is doubtful whether he has influenced the formal development of the modern novel in any important degree. In a history of technique, he could not be cited, in the way that Henry James or Émile Zola must be cited, over and over again, as the inventor of a peculiar manner or the founder of a new school. Writers of a more striking and flamboyant type leave a trail behind them as conspicuous as the tail of a comet. Gabriele d'Annunzio, for instance, from the moment that he sprang into public notice, radiated a clear and an ever-widening circle of influence, the effects of which can be easily traced by any one who cares to take the trouble, in the younger

generation of Continental writers. His imitators are as conspicuous as they would be if he had chosen to wear a scarlet necktie and they had chosen to copy him in that. It would be difficult to imagine Marion Crawford ever having done anything, in a literary way, sufficiently flaunting to warrant the symbolism of a red necktie. He remained from first to last, as he wished to remain, wholly free from mannerism; and one of the qualities which give to his books an unconscious charm is a simplicity of style and method which may be compared to that rare good taste in dress which does not draw attention to itself.

It has sometimes been claimed that Mr. Crawford was in a measure responsible for the modern spread of cosmopolitanism in fiction; but at best it must have been a remote influence, since his was of that rare and perfect kind that few others possess the skill to imitate. We have, of course, a surfeit of novelists who choose to lay their scenes all the way around the world and back again; and while they lead us on a gay chase across three continents, their point of view all the time remains insularly British or aggressively American. With this type of pseudo-cosmopolitanism, that of Mr. Crawford has nothing in common. It has often been said of him, that he was one of the very few Americans who had been mistaken in Paris for a Frenchman, in Munich

for a German, and in Rome for an Italian; and this power of assimilating racial traits and standpoints he carried over into his novels. He was not so much a cosmopolitan, in the sense of a man whose home is the world, as he was a man who has chanced to have a succession of different homes in widely scattered portions of the globe. His fondness for the cities where he successively stayed and worked,—for Munich and Prague, Constantinople and Rome and Paris,—always gets into his pages in spite of him, and passes on something of its contagion to the reader, from between the lines. It is distinctly worth noting that he has always from choice written of what was near at hand. *Mr. Isaacs*, his first book, it is true, was written after his return to America, but before the first intensity of his impressions had begun to fade. And it is significant that, although he had a rich store of material as a result of his two years' residence in India, he never again reverted to it. There was in particular one story, drawn from the earlier life of the man who served as prototype of Mr. Isaacs, which Mr. Crawford had mapped out and, even so recently as two years before his death, still talked of writing. But it was one of the books destined to remain unwritten.

Yet, whatever other influence Marion Crawford may have exerted, it is at least beyond question that few novelists of the present day have been

more widely read, or have had a more salutary effect in fostering a taste for what is clean and pure and high-minded in literature and in life. He has shown that it is possible to win and hold a very wide public, while maintaining a certain high standard of literary quality; he has shown that it is possible to offer social and domestic problems that will appeal to mature and thoughtful readers, and at the same time contain nothing which one might hesitate to put into the hands of the young and thoughtless. He has set, in these respects, a sort of high-water mark for fiction which frankly and honestly professes only to entertain: and in doing this, he is largely responsible for the increased proportion of clean, healthy, vigorous fiction that our younger writers are giving us to-day. Nevertheless he occupies a position somewhat apart from the general trend of the novel of to-day and of to-morrow, and for that reason is somewhat difficult to class. Almost any comparison that one ventures to make is likely to strike a majority of readers as odd and unjustified. Recently one of the English reviews spoke of him as approaching most nearly to Trollope and Mrs. Oliphant,—a curious partnership, which the writer wisely did not try to justify. In purpose and ideals, as well as in the uniformly readable quality of his books, he suggests a certain kinship with the late William Black. Yet of

the two Mr. Crawford is undeniably the finer artist, as well as the better story teller, with a far better chance of being remembered by a later generation. And whatever position is ultimately assigned to him, one thing is certain: that the general tendency of academic criticism will be to do him ampler justice and concede to him a higher meed of praise than he has hitherto received.

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

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Kate Douglas Wiggin is one of those rare and delightful spirits in modern literature who, by a certain quiet charm of their own, have freed themselves from most of the trammels of form and tradition to which more ordinary writers are subject; who even in doing quite ordinary things do them in an extraordinary way; who, in all they do, are in themselves, their personality, their attitudes toward life, their own best excuse for so doing—and who, when they happen to fit in most appropriately to a particular scheme of things—as, for instance, Kate Douglas Wiggin herself fits into a volume upon American Story Tellers—do so with a unique appropriateness.

Ordinarily, the qualities or the demerits of a literary production are matters to be determined quite aside from an author's personality, the place and hour of his or her birth, the inches of his or her stature and all the other little details of a personal or domestic nature into which, after our modern habit, we are forever too closely inquiring. In the present case, however, there are just a few facts that are worth putting briefly before us at

the start in order to understand more clearly this particular author's sources of inspiration, range of interests and limitations of experience. That she was born in Philadelphia; that she lived throughout her girlhood in the midst of the peaceful beauty of rural New England; that at the age of eighteen, after her stepfather's failing health had made a removal to California imperative, she joined her family at Santa Barbara immediately after her graduation from the Abbot Academy at Andover; that she has been twice married, the second time to Mr. George C. Riggs in 1895—although she continues to use her earlier name as the signature of her literary productions; that it was directly through her efforts that the first free kindergartens for poor children were organized in this country; and that for the past twenty-five years she has been prominently associated in many an administrative capacity with important educational movements—these facts concern us for our present purpose only to the extent to which they explain why her writings are what they are, and why they could not well have been otherwise.

A single sentence will serve to make this clear. Kate Douglas Wiggin is at heart a romanticist whose romance is woven not from the stuff that dreams are made of, but from the homespun threads of every-day life. She has an exuberant

and unquenchable spirit of optimism, of the sort that bubbles up spontaneously at the most unlikely moments, casting a dash of gold across her pages, just at the point where the shadows seem to lie heaviest. She reaches the heart and she appeals to the memory because she has in abundance this power of making very ordinary lives seem beautiful; because she writes only of the life that she has seen; and because, from the first story that she wrote up to the most recent, she has always preserved the clear directness of narration, the unaffectedness of form that are the qualities inborn in any one who hopes to interest a youthful audience, to hold bright, eager little faces under the spell of a spoken tale.

A glance down the list of Kate Douglas Wiggin's writings in any one of her recent volumes reveals upward of a score of titles—and these are exclusive of the educational books and the various collections of children's stories that she has compiled and edited in conjunction with her sister, Nora Archibald Smith. It would seem at a glance that Mrs. Wiggin had a rare fertility of imagination, a wide range of interests and an unusual power of productiveness. But a little closer examination shows that such variety and range as she achieves are produced from very simple and limited materials, like melodies of much depth and tenderness played on only one or two

strings. The settings of her stories are of three types: the California of her early memories, based on those two years in Santa Barbara; the rural New England of her entire girlhood, which she has somewhere described as "all the years that count most"; and the British Isles, which have given her—probably because she came to them later, in the full maturity of her receptive powers—a broader horizon and a keener intellectual stimulus than either of her other settings. She has said of herself that the more familiarity she has with a subject the less she desires to write about it, because "exact knowledge hampers one's imagination sometimes." In this respect, almost any one of Mrs. Wiggin's admirers will take the liberty of telling her that she is in a measure mistaken. It is only that saving "sometimes" at the tail-end of the sentence that keeps her from being very far astray. It is her perfect familiarity with the New England fields and woods, the New England ways of speech and dress and thought, the New England types of men and women and children—the types of children above all things—that is the golden key to the success of such books as *Timothy's Quest* and *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm.* Nor has her familiarity with these subjects made her one whit the less eager to revert to them. New England is her chosen field and she goes back to it again and

again, with no visible diminution of interest or of power. On the other hand, it is quite easy to see how the stimulus of foreign scenes of the kind that produced the "Penelope" series might grow dull as their familiarity increased. The whole point to *Penelope's Experiences*, as to Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, was the first sharp imprint of the unfamiliar, the incisive force of contrast—and, of course, each subsequent impression was bound to become less keen, like the duller mintings of a coin as the die begins to wear smooth.

Details of this sort, however, will be seen more clearly when we come to take up her separate works for discussion. For the moment, let us consider frankly what her standards are as a writer of fiction: what ideas she has of form and of technique, what plan she seems to make for telling her stories and to what extent she succeeds in building them according to the accepted rules. In this connection, it seems worth while to quote a passage of reminiscences by her sister, Nora Archibald Smith, giving a rather graphic glimpse of what sort of a child it was that was destined to grow into the woman who to this day has preserved such a rare insight into the hearts of the children both of real life and of her dreams. The passage in question may have been widely circulated or it may not. It may form part of

a preface to some volume already in its many thousands, or it may be an extract from a private letter; in any case, the present writer ran across it for the first time in a recent article by Ashley Gibson, published in the London *Bookman.*

My sister was certainly a capable little person at a tender age, concocting delectable milk toast, browning toothsome buckwheats and generally making a very good Parents' Assistant. I have also visions of her toiling at patchwork and oversewing sheets like a nice old-fashioned little girl in a story-book.

Further to illustrate her personality, I think no one much in her company at any age could have failed to note an exceedingly lively tongue and a general air of executive ability.

If I am to be truthful, I must say that I recall few indications of budding authorship, save an engrossing diary (kept for six months only) and a devotion to reading.

Her " literary passions " were *The Arabian Nights, Scottish Chiefs, Don Quixote, Thaddeus of Warsaw,* Irving's *Mahomet,* Thackeray's *Snobs, Undine,* and *The Martyrs of Spain.* These and others, joined to an old green Shakespeare and a plum-pudding edition of Dickens, were the chief of her diet.

For our immediate purpose the center of interest in the above passage lies, of course, in the list of favorite books. What a splendid stimulus they are, one and all of them, to the young imagi-

nation and how superbly defiant of the trammels of modern technique! Who in the world, if his reading had been limited to these books, even though they include such gems as *The Christmas Carol* and *Undine* and the *Forty Thieves*, would ever dream, even remotely, of the modern short-story form with its insistence on unity of effect and economy of means? And this is an excellent place at which to say that had no one seen fit to betray what Kate Douglas Wiggin's early reading included, it would have been a safe venture to make up from pure conjecture very nearly the same sort of list. In the case of an author who combines so many merits with so few defects there can be no harm in saying quite bluntly that however much or little she may know of the accepted rules of story structure, she deliberately and blandly ignores them wherever she sees fit—and to a critic who rates the importance of technique of form rather highly it is almost exasperating to find how frequently she justifies herself—and by breaking the rules secures an effect that could not have been gained by adhering to them. She seldom knows when she has reached the end of a story; she almost always stops too soon or else not soon enough—that is, if you are judging her stories by the ordinary tests. But that is precisely what nobody wants to do. If she stops too soon, no one ever thinks of saying to her, "This

is inartistic and unfinished"; not at all, they simply emulate Oliver Twist and cry for more. If she fails to notice when the end of a story is reached and goes steadily onward with that unflagging power of invention, that felicitous mimicry of human types, that sparkle and sunshine of hope and faith, no one would ever think of stopping her, of saying, "You have gone beyond your goal, you ought to have turned in at the gate!" They are only too glad that she forgot to turn in.

Now all this is as it is for the very simple and sufficient reason that with Kate Douglas Wiggin, just as with a few other big-hearted, clear-sighted writers, whose purposes are very simple and few and worthy, the substance is so vastly more important than the form—or rather, I ought to say, than somebody else's dictum of what the form ought to be. Kate Douglas Wiggin is in a measure an anomaly in American letters, being on the one hand so peculiarly native and even local that one feels it would be possible to pick out the particular habitation of her childhood simply by strolling through New England byways until one happened upon it; and yet, on the other, so cosmopolitan that she has been frankly recognized in England by more than one critic as our leading writer of her sex with just one possible rival, Mrs. Wilkins-Freeman. And

while she has that high standard of good taste in letters that makes her next of kin to Agnes Repplier (is this, by the way, a mark of sisterhood due to her Philadelphia birth?), she nevertheless has achieved that approval of democracy so conclusively and substantially attested by sales that reach the two hundred thousand mark. Now the easiest way to understand all this: the easiest way to explain why her books are what they are, and not something altogether different, is to remember that before she was known as a writer she was a master hand at kindergarten work; she knew how to hold the attention of children, she knew the way which for her was the best, the inevitable way, to tell a story to children; and all the stories that she has told and all the stories she has printed have owed their power and their charm to that pervading simplicity and sincerity and naïve literalness that made her success as a teacher of children.

And it is precisely in the spirit of childhood that the public has received her books. Whether she writes of the simple-hearted Rebecca or the cosmopolitan and sophisticated Penelope, there is the same clamorous demand for more—a demand which, like all good-natured story tellers, she does her best to gratify. And because they are all imbued with this simple, unaffected, kindergarten spirit, the public receives them with the uncritical

mind of childhood, closing its eyes to the fact that the further adventures of Rebecca are not quite as good as the earlier and that the experiences of Penelope in Ireland and Scotland lack something of the freshness of her first months in England. How many times we have heard children clamoring for "Just one more story"; and the tired story teller says doubtfully, "But I don't know any more stories; I haven't any good ones left!" and the children answer, "We don't care, tell us anything—anything so long as it is a story and you tell it!" That, in brief, is the public's attitude toward Kate Douglas Wiggin, tacitly expressed by the popularity of each new book. And, after all, an author can hardly have a higher order of praise than this public testimony that her worst is preferable to many another author's best.

The writings of Kate Douglas Wiggin fall of their own accord into three classes, one of which, the purely educational, written in collaboration—such as *Froebel's Gifts* and *Kindergarten Principles and Practice*—does not concern us here. The other two groups are, first: the bulk of her writings, being stories dealing more or less directly with the life problems of children and so written that they appeal almost equally to the child reader and to the man or woman who has preserved, even though pretty deeply buried, some

smoldering embers of the childhood spirit; and, secondly, a group of books much harder to characterize because they are not, on the one hand, novels, nor, on the other, can they fairly be called inspired guidebooks; and yet, unless they are to be recognized as in some proportion a blending of these two, there is no other existing classification for them.

The childhood stories begin as far back as 1888 with *The Birds' Christmas Carol*, a simple, tender, whimsical Christmas tale that has quite justly come to be already a sort of children's classic. Then followed in swift succession *The Story of Patsy, A Summer in a Cañon*—one of the few books due to her Santa Barbara memories—and, in 1890, *Timothy's Quest*. This volume is worth while pausing over for a moment, not only because it is an excellent prototype of the bulk of Mrs. Wiggin's works, but because it helps us to see how limited in their variety are the threads with which she weaves and the patterns that she chooses to make. Timothy is a lad of ten or eleven—foundling asylums are not over-accurate in their records; Lady Gay, his protégée, is an exceedingly pretty child of possibly eighteen months or more. Certain people have seen fit to pay periodic sums, for the support of these two waifs, to a bedraggled and drunken hag named Flossie, in a reeking slum known as Minerva

Court. For the simple reason that so far as the writer is aware this is the one time in all Mrs. Wiggin's fiction where she has permitted herself to picture a slum, it is worth while to quote briefly from her description of Minerva Court. Had she chosen to do so, she might, not ineffectively, have rivaled the squalor and repulsiveness of Arthur Morrison's *Tales of Mean Streets.*

> Children carrying pitchers of beer were often to be seen hurrying to and fro on their miserable errand . . . . There were frowsy, sleepy-looking women hanging out of their windows gossiping with their equally unkempt and haggard neighbors; apathetic men sitting on the doorsteps, in their shirt-sleeves smoking; a dull, dirty baby, disporting itself in the gutter; while the sound of a melancholy accordion (the chosen instrument of poverty and misery) floated from an upper chamber, and added its discordant mite to the general desolation. The sidewalks had apparently never known the touch of a broom, and the middle of the street looked more like an elongated junk-heap than anything else. . . .
>
> That was Minerva Court! A little piece of your world, my world, God's world (and the Devil's), lying peacefully fallow, awaiting the services of some inspired Home Missionary Society.

This paragraph is here set down chiefly for the sake of its contrast to all of Mrs. Wiggin's later methods and ideals. Not that she has ever

lost her interest in the swarming life of big cities, the brilliant and the sordid alike. To realize this one has only to read her account of market night in one of the "Penelope" chapters entitled "Tuppenny Travels in London." Yet, in that very chapter, she voices that prevailing spirit of her books which insistently iterates that in a world where there is so much sunshine it does not pay to look too closely into the shadows:

> As to the dark alleys and tenements on the fringe of this glare and brilliant confusion, this Babel of sound and ant-bed of moving life, one can only surmise and pity and shudder; close one's eyes and ears to it a little, or one could never sleep for thinking of it, yet not too tightly, lest one sleep too soundly, and forget altogether the seamy side of things.

But to go back to *Timothy's Quest:* Flossie, the hag, has died and the almshouse is the destined fate of Timothy and Lady Gay. But the instinct of chivalry and protection has awakened early in Timothy; and in obedience to this instinct he steals out into the night with the baby girl in his arms and laboriously, doggedly, fearlessly makes his way far from the city, hour by hour, mile after mile, till a beautiful, restful, eminently safe country house by the wayside appeals to him as the ideal spot where Lady Gay should find a home. The mere fact that this farmhouse is pre-

sided over by two mature spinsters who have never before in their lives had children around them is not a matter to daunt a valiant soul like Timothy's nor disconcert a Heaven-sent story teller like Mrs. Wiggin—and, of course, Timothy triumphs gloriously in all his plans. The point that it seems worth while to make just here is that in this book, as in *Polly Oliver's Problem*, a little later, and still again in both of the Rebecca books, the underlying motive, the germ idea, as one may call it, is a sort of premature sense of responsibility, possessed by just a few children, an embryo foreshadowing of the father love or mother love which is to come later, that makes the Timothies and the Pollies and the Rebeccas of real life bend their fragile shoulders under burdens almost too heavy for their young strength.

It would not be within the scope of the present essay to speak at any great length of *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm*. It has received, to be sure, quite triumphantly the popular vote. Its central character is the one that already enjoys the widest acquaintanceship; and now that she has come before the footlights, she is destined to a new and still wider fame. *Rebecca* is probably the volume by which the author will be most frequently measured in literary analyses, largely for the reason that it is the one by which she is

most easily measured. If we make due allowance for the change in manners and ideals from decade to decade, *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* appeals to the readers of to-day for much the same reasons and with much the same right that Miss Alcott's *Little Women* appealed to an earlier generation, and "Elizabeth Wetherill's" *Wide, Wide World* to a generation still more remote. Indeed, if one shuts one's mind to the rather exasperating priggishness of that earlier period, the ubiquitous praying and psalm singing and reading of Scriptures which in those days was an inseparable quality of all properly conducted little heroines, there is a good deal in the advent of Ellen Montgomery to her Aunt Fortune's farm, her sensitive shrinking from her aunt's rough ways and rougher tongue, her haven of refuge in the slow-spoken, slow-moving farmer, Mr. Van Brunt; and, in general, the whole atmosphere behind the story of New England farm life, farm hardships and farm festivals—there is, it seems to me, in all this a great deal of the same sort of appeal as that which the present generation finds in Rebecca. But, of course, there is one rather important distinction: it was the habit in those days to look resignedly upon this world as a vale of tears to be passed through somehow as best one could; while to Kate Douglas Wiggin and to one and all of her heroines, it is a supremely

glorious thing just to be alive and to smell the flowers and see the sunshine—and the author who can spread the contagion of such feeling among a few thousand of readers is a sort of "inspired Home Missionary Society" in herself.

One would like to have the space to say a few pleasant things about *Rose o' the River*, which is as tranquil and naïve a little pastoral as a modern *Daphnis and Chloe*. *The Old Peabody Pew* is another slim little volume—at least so far as its text goes; it is the ambition of the illustrator which has necessitated the wide page and ample margin—that tempts one to bestow upon it a disproportionate amount of notice. Just the fulfilment of a long-cherished dream, the final blossoming of a hope that had almost withered in the heart of a New England girl, now a girl no longer, who had seen the bright years slip away, one by one, while she waited, mutely, patiently, for the lover who had gone away to seek his fortune; the lover who through all these years had sent no word and to all appearances had forgotten her. It is a true Christmas story, bright with the spirit of hope and faith and love—and, what is more, it is the best piece of fiction, so far as pure structure goes, that the author has ever put together.

The second and last group into which Mrs. Wiggin's stories divide themselves are those the

scenes of which are enacted in the British Isles. As already intimated, they are of a more urbane, more sophisticated type, and appeal, in consequence, to a more special audience on both sides of the Atlantic. The first of the Penelope books, the one containing that delightfully independent and well-poised young woman's experiences in London and in rural England, is easily the bright and shining gem of the collection. The late Mr. Laurence Hutton did not quite share this view. To his enthusiastic appreciation any gradation of merit in the "Penelope" books was not to be thought of. "Her first course," he once wrote, "served in England, is as delicate and savory as is her second course, purveyed in Scotland; while her third course, now being dished up in Ireland, promises as well as did those which preceded it. We can only hope, before the symposium is brought to a close, that she will regale us with Wales as a salad, and with the Isle of Man as a dessert."

Now Mr. Hutton's enthusiasm is easy, not only to understand, but to share. Those three volumes, devoted to the confidential relations from the facile and diverting pen of Miss Penelope Hazelton, are surely to be numbered among that sadly small collection of modern volumes that people of real culture and intelligence find themselves, from time to time, reverting to for another, and

yet another perusal. But to pronounce all three of them of equal merit is to proclaim one's own lack of discrimination. It is the same sort of mental astigmatism as would prompt one to claim that there was no gradation of merit between *The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table* and its companion volumes devoted respectively to The Professor and The Poet. As there is much to be said in praise of the " Penelope " books, it is well to begin with what little there is to be said against them and to have it over with. Kate Douglas Wiggin, it may be noted parenthetically, never attempted a regularly constructed full-length novel; Penelope is her nearest approach to a regulation heroine. And that simplicity of structural form, that tendency to harp upon just one or two strings which pervades all her other works, is equally in evidence here. Let us analyze, quite briefly and without malice, these three volumes which, for convenience' sake, we may christen the Trilogy of the Rose, the Heather and the Shamrock.

First, in *Penelope's Experiences in England*, we are introduced to that perennially delightful trio, Penelope herself and her two traveling companions, Francesca and Salomina, offering an infinite variety in feminine moods, temperaments, personal appearance and age. Whether regarded as a guidebook, as a *picaresco* novel of the gentler

sex, as a summer idyll or as just a miscellany of feminine cleverness, the book is a delight; but any one who wishes to epitomize the plot finds himself reduced to something like the following:

A young American woman, charming but fancy-free, finds it a pleasant summer's pastime to be made love to intermittently by a young man very much in earnest amid the picturesque surroundings of English byways and hedges, churches and ruined castles. Then comes a weary interregnum during which the suitor is detained elsewhere. A little loneliness teaches her what she ought to have known all the time and prepares her to give him the right sort of a welcome when he at last comes back to claim her.

The experiences in Scotland simply shift the limelight from Penelope to Francesca. A charming and unattached young woman finds it pleasant to be wooed amid the Scotch heather by an earnest young *meenister* of the *estaiblished* church, but she too remains somewhat uncertain of her own mind until a few weeks' separation gives him a chance to come and play the conquering hero.

The experiences in Ireland are again the same tune in a new key with Salomina as the *leitmotiv*. Salomina is not exactly young, though still undeniably charming; and not strictly unattached, because many years ago she loved an Irishman, who inconsiderately married some one else, but

is now a widower. She, in her turn, finds it pleasurably romantic to be courted in a reserved, middle-aged fashion, amid the Irish lakes, the bogs of Lisconnel and the glens of Antrim. She too finds a brief loneliness salutary and is quite prepared to signify a cordial assent just as soon as the Irishman vouchsafes her a second chance.

Such at least is the summary which an unfriendly critic might give if he felt in a carping mood. There is a rather obvious duplication of plot running through these books—which, after all, is a better and franker thing than an artificial attempt at variations when the author knows, and the reader knows, and the author knows that the reader knows that the plot is only a makeshift at best—something to carry the real vital substance of the book, and every bit as conventional as a blue muslin rose or a cigar-store Indian.

The real charm and magnetism of these "Penelope" books depend, of course, upon their personal equation. Mrs. Wiggin chose for her purpose the freest, most elastic vehicle that she could find for conveying her exceedingly subtle and equally frank observations of such points of difference as must inevitably strike the cultured and well-bred American visitor to the British Isles.

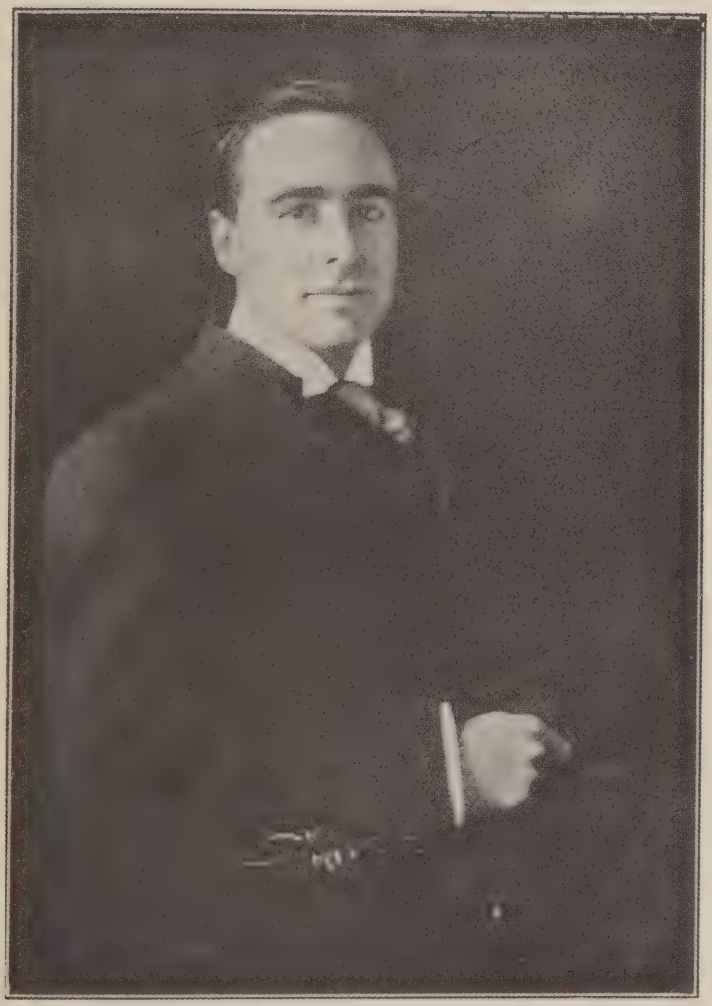
That she has done this thing with rare tact is best evidenced by the fact that the English enjoy the cleverness of her attack quite as much as

we do ourselves, and that such a paper as *The Spectator* genially remarks that she is the most successful ambassador that the United States has yet sent to England. The " Penelope " books are a part of the mental equipment that the American visitor to the British Isles will do well to provide himself with upon his first visit—in precisely the same way that on his first trip down the Thames he will read Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat;* or William Black's *Strange Adventures of a Houseboat;* and on reaching Florence or Rome will wish to refresh his memory of *Romola* or *The Marble Faun.*

And yet there is a certain inevitable compunction that follows even a suggestion that the romance of these " Penelope " books is perfunctory. One feels, somehow, that the author's eyes would follow one with a haunting disapproval—because to her the world is obviously made up of romance. She cannot help it; she is so constituted, and thank Heaven that she is! Because there are so lamentably few writers to-day in whom sunshine and bright hopefulness and the joy of living are incarnated; and among these Kate Douglas Wiggin holds a privileged place.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

If there is any one writer among the American Story Tellers of to-day who best illustrates the familiar paradox that genius is a capacity for taking infinite pains, that writer is Mr. Winston Churchill. That his novels are born of an inexhaustible patience, a dogged determination to be true to his own stern exactions both in style and substance, is a self-evident fact. It is not necessary to know the prosaic details of his literary methods, or even to remember that he considers three or four years none too long a time to bestow upon a single volume. Such matters do not concern the critic, excepting in so far as they stand revealed by internal evidence—and in the case of Mr. Churchill they are woven into the very warp and woof of every page he writes. There is no escape from the pervading sense of careful documentation, plodding diligence, endless repolishing. It is impossible to read a single chapter without being aware that its production involved a labor not unlike the slow process of chipping away fragment by fragment, grain by grain, the enveloping marble from the emerging



WINSTON CHURCHILL

statue—and no small share of that labor is expended in covering its own traces. The net result is that, from *Richard Carvel* to *A Modern Chronicle*, these novels present themselves to the public with an air of solid dignity and conscious worth that involuntarily calls to mind portly, middle-aged, prosperous gentlemen in immaculate frock coats, who typify the so-called Pillars of the Church.

In other words, the sum and substance of all adverse criticism upon Mr. Winston Churchill's books may be reduced to this—there is in them all a streak of literary pharisaism, a certain air of seeming to thank God openly that they are not like other books. Let other books, if they choose, be frivolous or melodramatic, or ultra-modern according to any one of the fifty various and transitory schools of fiction that spring up and pass like mushrooms. Mr. Churchill's books desire no kinship with such as these. They aspire to be Literature, spelled with a capital L; they are carefully fashioned upon the great Mid-Victorian models; one almost questions whether the author did not deliberately draw his dividing line at Thackeray and refuse to regard any subsequent developments of technique in fiction as deserving of notice.

The consequence is that in his method of construction, Mr. Churchill has retained the chief

faults of his early models as well as the qualities that he has sought to emulate. The conception of a well-knit plot without irrelevant characters and episodes and with the interest strongly focused upon some one main issue is distinctly modern. So also is the instinct which tells an author at what point in the infinite sequence of human events his special series of episodes logically begins and at what point it ends. The naïve assumption of the earlier novelists that a story begins with the birth of a particular man or woman has long since become an exploded fallacy. The writers of to-day recognize that in its broadest sense the life story of any human being has already begun unnumbered generations before his birth, and that its end is not within the powers of human foresight to predict; while, in a narrower sense, the history of a human life cannot in itself constitute a story-structure, but is at best the raw material for several stories. Now, when an author chooses to follow the old-fashioned method of introducing his characters practically in their cradles and following their subsequent development step by step, and year by year, well into the prime of life, it is too much to ask of him that he shall give us a well-constructed plot. Indeed, the form itself warns us that he is attempting nothing more complex than a family chronicle and, therefore, necessarily of a loose

and rambling nature. As a matter of fact, Mr. Churchill's plots are not his strong point. As we shall see in taking up the separate volumes, they give the impression of wandering aimlessly along the highways and byways of life, most of the time with no clear structural reason for turning to the right rather than the left, no preconceived goal toward which the various tangled threads of the story are converging.

Now, there is no intention of conveying the idea that Mr. Churchill is unaware of what he is doing. On the contrary, nothing is clearer than the fact that he knows perfectly well the sort of plot-structure that he is using, and that he could have used quite a different kind had he so chosen. His method is the time-honored method of Fielding and of Thackeray and, to some extent, of Dickens. Like Thackeray, he chooses to think of himself as Master of the Show and to keep us reminded that it is he who pulls the wires that make the puppets dance. He even interrupts himself occasionally to regret, between parentheses, that the space limit of his book will not let him tell us more about some particular character whom he has just introduced, but assures us that we shall meet that character again in a later volume. Mr. Churchill likes to do this sort of thing; and the mere fact that the whole tendency of fiction to-day is toward the objective

method and away from the old-fashioned, confidential relation between author and public obviously does not concern him in the least. After all, it is a sufficiently harmless mannerism, but none the less as out of date as powdered wigs and knee breeches.

The practice of chronicling the childhood of hero or heroine calls for rather more specific notice. There is, of course, only one ground on which it may be defended—just as there is only one ground on which to defend the analogous practice of narrating the family history of the hero's ancestors for several generations back. If we grant that human character is the result of heredity modified by environment, then, of course, a knowledge of a man's ancestry explains his inherited traits and a knowledge of his early surroundings shows how those traits have become modified. But now and then we find a man or woman in whom heredity has had a free hand and environment has accomplished little or nothing. We realize that it would have made small practical difference in which hemisphere they had been reared or what manner of guardians and teachers they had had. The strong, primitive impulses and passions of their race, whether for good or bad, are no more to be curbed or changed by food or climate or higher mathematics than the color of their hair and eyes. When dealing with such

strongly defined characters, it is simply a waste of time to picture minutely the influences to which their childhood was subjected. Mr. Churchill's heroes and heroines belong with hardly an exception to this dominant, self-sufficient class. Even as small children, they have a precocious assurance; they foreshadow, with surprising accuracy, the men and women they are destined to become. It is true that Mr. Churchill's portraiture of childhood is rather well done; he allows himself in these portions to fall into a lighter vein, he comes nearer than anywhere else to genuine humor. Nevertheless, the impression he leaves, in one and all of his books, is that his characters have become what they are, not because of environment, but in defiance of it—and for that reason the introductory chapters of each book are structurally superfluous.

The foregoing remarks, however, apply only so long as we are considering Mr. Churchill's books as studies of human character. But it must be remembered that a second and, in his eyes, an equally important function of his books is to picture the life of a period, the net results of national or social development. There can be no question that he has succeeded admirably in handling big backgrounds: few American novelists have achieved as he has that sense of wide spaces of earth and sky, the weariness of drag-

ging miles, the monotony of passing years, the motley movements of humanity in the mass, the whole fundamental trick of making us feel the relative value of our own modest holdings, our individual interests, our brief hour, as contrasted with mankind and with eternity. It makes small difference whether he is describing a drunken broil in a Colonial tavern, an Indian massacre in Kentucky or a political riot in a New England State Legislature—in either case his trick of characterization is as graphic and almost as indefatigable as that of the camera lens. You see face after face, figure behind figure, each drawn with fewer and swifter strokes as they become more blurred by distance, yet every one individualized and recognizable. And back of these, beyond the range of sight, you still feel the presence of a crowd, shoulder jostling shoulder, tongue answering tongue, full of the rough virility of conflict.

Taken as a whole, with the exception of his earliest and latest, *The Celebrity* and *A Modern Chronicle*, Mr. Churchill's books may not unjustly be defined as comprehensive panoramas of American history, each standing as a vivid summing up of some national or local crisis. Regarding the literal accuracy of historical novels in general and of Mr. Churchill's in particular, those critics may quibble to whom the letter seems more

essential than the spirit. One cannot escape the conviction that the author of *Richard Carvel* errs too far on the side of accuracy—that if his facts were questioned, he would be painfully prompt in producing original documents. Indeed, there are episodes in *Richard Carvel*, and in *The Crisis* and *The Crossing* as well, that narrowly escape the weariness of the historical monograph, and make one wish that the author had burned his library and relied upon the sheer force of his imagination. *Les Trois Mousquetaires* had a scant allowance of historical accuracy, but it had what was far more essential—a generous supply of real flesh and blood.

And yet, any fair estimate of Mr. Churchill must necessarily recognize that his favorite formula narrowly misses that of the so-called epic novel,—just as we have already seen that Marion Crawford missed it in his Saracinesca series. He uses, with conscious purpose, a double theme: first, the big, basic idea underlying some national or ethical crisis; and secondly, a specific human story, standing out vividly in the central focus with the larger, wider theme serving as background. Where his stories fail to achieve the epic magnitude is in lacking that essential symbolic relationship between the greater and the lesser theme. His central figures find their lives molded and modified, as all lives must be, by the

conditions and the events of their own epoch—but they are scarcely symbolic of that epoch; they do not leave the impression that they are the mouthpiece of their country and generation. Thus, Richard Carvel was, at best, an example of the Colonial aristocracy, but he was not in character or career such an embodiment of it that the term, a "Richard Carvel," would have any real significance. David Ritchie, in *The Crossing*, is part and parcel of that movement which began the great western migration that was destined to stop only at the Pacific; but there is nothing in his life which in any way symbolizes a great awakening. He is of his time and generation because he has to be, rather than because he would not have had it otherwise if he could.

It has seemed worth while briefly to point out in a general way the extent to which Mr. Churchill parts company with the modern trend of technique in fiction. To note these differences is by no means equivalent to passing censure upon them. By a stricter system of construction, a sterner elimination of non-essentials, it is quite possible that Mr. Churchill's novels would have lost as much as they would have gained. They would at least have lost one element which every reader of them must feel to a marked degree: namely, that sense of the unexpected and inexplicable; that infinitude of daily happenings, of

accidents and coincidences, the meaning of which in the ultimate pattern of life must always baffle us.

Aside from a short, satiric play, *The Title Mart*, Mr. Churchill's published works now include seven volumes. Of these, the earliest in point of actual composition was *Richard Carvel*, although its publication was anticipated by some months by *The Celebrity*, a clever farce of the Mistaken Identity type, which served its purpose as a sort of comic poster to attract public attention to his more ambitious work. Of the remaining six that have since come, at almost uniform intervals, from his pen, the earlier three, *Richard Carvel*, *The Crisis*, and *The Crossing*, are historical novels in the accepted sense. *Coniston* and *Mr. Crewe's Career*, while presumably resting on an equally solid foundation of local history, fall into the class of the American political novel, with its unsavory accessories of bribery, lobbying and bossism—the type familiarly exemplified in Paul Leicester Ford's *Honorable Peter Stirling* and Brand Whitlock's *Thirteenth District*. The last of the six, *A Modern Chronicle*, is a new departure for Mr. Churchill, being an ambitious study of American marriage and divorce and belonging, in theme, if not in magnitude, on the shelf with Professor Robert Herrick's much-discussed *Together*.

The statement was made earlier in this chapter that plot construction was Mr. Churchill's principal weakness; and the justness of this criticism may easily be seen by a brief examination of the separate stories. To begin with, *Richard Carvel* concerns itself with the life history of an orphan boy in the province of Maryland, reared by his stern old grandfather in strict Tory principles, but little by little imbibing revolutionary doctrines from associates of his own generation. An unscrupulous uncle scheming for the family inheritance has young Carvel waylaid, kidnapped and flung aboard a pirate craft, to be later dropped over the rail at a convenient time. The pirate boat, however, is scuttled by the famous naval hero, John Paul Jones, and Carvel is the sole survivor. Subsequently, fate lands him in London, penniless and without friends, where he spends some weary months in the debtors' prison, knowing all the while that the girl whom he loved back in America is now also in London, courted by dukes and earls, and that his present predicament is known quite well to the girl's father, who is only too glad to have a troublesome suitor out of harm's way. The rest of the story consists of some swift changes of fortune, some well-drawn pictures of fashionable English life in which Horace Walpole, Charles James Fox and other historic personages take part; a few stirring naval

battles; and finally peace between the two countries and Carvel happily married and settled on his ancestral acres. It is to be noticed that this plot is merely a string of episodes, governed for the most part by the intervention of chance. It is little more than a highly developed *picaresco* type with rather less cohesion than the average Dumas romance. Whatever literary quality it possesses is due not to plot but to individual portraiture and a pervading sense of atmosphere.

The specific story of David Ritchie in *The Crossing* has even less cohesion than *Richard Carvel*. Throughout the greater part of it, Ritchie is a mere lad and as drummer boy accompanies the expedition led by George Rogers Clark, from Kentucky northward, to the Wabash River and Vincennes. It is a chronicle of border warfare, of Indian treachery and ghastly massacres. It is scarcely fiction at all in the strict sense of the term, but rather a sort of pictorial history of the Clark expedition, painted in vivid words. In the second half, the plot grows more cohesive. Ritchie, like Carvel, is an orphan with a worthless uncle who, instead of befriending him, flees to England at the outbreak of the war. The uncle's wife takes advantage of her husband's desertion to elope with her lover, leaving a small son to shift for himself. This son, Ritchie's cousin, later makes it his chief object in life to hunt down his

mother and her companion and inflict vengeance upon them; but long years pass before he finally, through Ritchie's intervention, finds her in New Orleans, dying of yellow fever and is reconciled with her before her death. This and the additional fact that Ritchie has found in New Orleans the young woman whom he is destined to marry constitute all that is worth epitomizing in the way of a central plot. Now, it is the lot of a good many human beings, both in childhood and in later years, to drift along the stream of life, not shaping their own destinies, but allying them with the destinies of others; and it often happens that somewhere or other, in the course of such drifting, they meet a woman whom they wish to marry. It does not, however, usually occur to a novelist that this is the stuff of which books are made. Mr. Churchill's own explanation of *The Crossing* is that it expresses "the first instinctive reaching out of an infant nation which was one day to become a giant"; in his opinion, "No annals in the world's history are more wonderful than the story of the conquest of Kentucky and Tennessee by the pioneers"; he confesses that it was a difficult task to gather together in a novel the elements necessary to picture this movement; that the autobiography of David Ritchie is as near as he can come to its solution, and that he has "a great sense of its incompleteness." There is but

one flaw in his self-criticism; the trouble with *The Crossing* is not that it lacks completeness, but that it fails to be a novel.

Passing over *The Crisis*, that story of the Civil War which is at best a less vigorous repetition of the qualities and the shortcomings of *Richard Carvel*, we come to *Coniston*. This is a book which deserves rather careful consideration, not merely because it shows us people no longer through the veil of romantic glamor, but face to face; but more especially because it is the one book he has yet written the plot of which will bear careful dissection. *Coniston* may not unfairly be called a prose epic of political corruption as it existed in New England a generation or more ago. From the critic's standpoint it is quite unimportant whether the particular State that the author had in mind happened to be Vermont or Connecticut or Rhode Island. What is important is that we get a sense of life and of conflict; of impulses to do right, clashing with the instincts of self-protection; of a grim party battle for the political survival of the fittest, and the entire State, its banks, its franchises, its governor, its legislature, all reposing in the pocket of one man, the undisputed party boss. This man, Jethro Bass, simple farmer by origin, taciturn, inscrutable, with his streak of sardonic humor, and his slight, unforgettable stammer, is easily the most important sin-

gle figure that Mr. Churchill has drawn—one might venture to predict the most important figure that he is destined ever to draw. Jethro Bass is not merely an individual; he is the concrete presentment of a type which, though well-nigh passed away, is destined to be remembered. It is not too much praise to say that in the annals of fiction a Jethro Bass deserves to stand for as definite a figure as a Pecksniff, a Micawber, or a Becky Sharp. A big, vital, political issue for a background, a unique and dominant figure for the central interest, are already two prime factors of an important novel. What binds the whole together and makes this volume, in contrast to all Mr. Churchill's others, a piece of good construction is that the individual tragedy of the story grows out of the selfsame source as the bigger issue: namely, Jethro Bass's utter unscrupulousness. Like Mr. Churchill's other books, *Coniston* gives us the entire childhood of its heroine; in fact, it goes further than that and shows us the youth, the marriage and death of the heroine's mother. But this time he has structurally justified his method. The childhood of Cynthia Wetherell, under the guardianship of Jethro, is to be sure no more a study of character molded by environment than was the childhood of David Ritchie in *The Crossing* or, as we shall presently see, the childhood of Honora Leffingwell in *A Modern Chron-*

icle. But it happens that in *Coniston* the focus of interest is not Cynthia Wetherell, but Jethro Bass; and the story of her childhood serves a second and more important purpose as a masterly study of a man's slow transformation under the influence of affection and trust. Jethro Bass once hoped to marry Cynthia Wetherell's mother. At that time, he too was young, with a choice of ways before him. He chose, then and there, to take the first step toward the political conquest of his town, the first step toward the bossism of the whole State; and the girl's clear, fearless eyes looking into his own read him aright and knew there could be no happiness for her where there could not also be honor. Afterwards, when Jethro befriends the dead woman's orphan daughter, and sees in her those same clear, fearless eyes, his one great wish is that she may always be spared the knowledge of his knavery, the source of his wealth, the secret of his power. To the reader, all the undercurrents of dishonest politics are exposed, naked and unashamed. Mr. Churchill has nowhere else approached in sheer narrative power the graphic vigor of the best scenes in this book; that, for instance, of the wonderful "Woodchuck Session" in which the Truro Franchise is jammed through the legislature by a bit of unparalleled trickery; and the equally remarkable interview with President Grant, in which Jethro saves the power

almost wrested from him by forcing the appointment of his candidate for a second-class post-office. Scenes like these are enough on which to build a reputation. They belong to the memorable situations in the annals of fiction. And the climax to which the story inevitably works up is a fitting conclusion to an exceptionally good piece of constructive craftsmanship. It happens that the life happiness of Cynthia can be purchased by Jethro only at the price of his own political downfall; and this sacrifice he makes freely, gladly, secretly. To the world at large he is defeated and dethroned, a man who has outlived his usefulness; to Cynthia, he is not merely the source of happiness, but a man in whom her affection has worked a great and wonderful reformation. The climax of the book triumphantly achieves the double purpose of effecting a crisis equally momentous to the individuals of the central group and to the world at large that forms the story's background.

It would be an anticlimax after *Coniston* to examine in detail *Mr. Crewe's Career*, which treats of the same order of corruption in State politics, but deals with a later generation and in a spirit of lighter comedy. Accordingly, there remains only Mr. Churchill's new volume, *A Modern Chronicle*. Here for the first time the author ventures to make woman, the American woman of to-day,

his central point of interest. It is rather remarkable that no one has taken the trouble to point out that in all his earlier books the portrayal of women was one of Mr. Churchill's serious deficiencies. Even in his period of romanticism, his men stood out strongly, like living portraits; but his women have for the most part been mere conventional sketches, either quite colorless like Dorothy Manners in *Richard Carvel* or impossible symbols of all the virtues at once, like Cynthia Wetherell in *Coniston*. That is why it is such a surprising thing to find him giving us in Honora Leffingwell a woman who is really alive, a woman full of illogical moods and caprices, a woman who, take her from start to finish, is very nearly, although not quite, a consistent piece of characterization. It is rather exasperating to see by how narrow a margin Mr. Churchill missed doing a big piece of work in *A Modern Chronicle*. That he did miss so doing is due mainly to that inherent fault of his, the unwillingness or inability to construct carefully. Honora Leffingwell's story seems too largely a matter of the whims of chance to be of great significance to the world at large. Her childhood and youth are sketched at rather tedious length, with the net result that we know she almost, but not quite, made up her mind to marry Peter Erwin, the close companion of these early years. Subsequently, after a week's ac-

quaintance, she consents to marry Howard Spence, portly, prosperous and not too young—a typical modern business-man, whose soul is in the money market and who, after marriage, does not realize that a wife needs an occasional word of appreciation. Honora naturally seeks attention elsewhere, and finds it in Trixton Brent, who is an adept at making love to other men's wives. What saves her from Trixton Brent she never knows. His failure is not his fault; it is simply a matter of temperament. But when she meets Hugh Chiltern, with his personal charm and his unspeakable reputation, she ceases to have a will of her own. Being for the first time in his life seriously in love, he easily persuades her to break with her husband, go West into the exile of a divorce colony and after the needful delay marry him. But her second marriage for love proves as big a failure as her first marriage for ambition; and when Chiltern rides a horse against which he has been warned, and breaks his neck in consequence, the reader gives a sigh of relief. Then Peter Erwin, her childhood friend, drifts into view again, and we leave her on the brink of a third matrimonial experiment. Just a succession of episodes, you see; the story of a woman who does not know her own mind. The disillusion and unrest of the first marriage are good workmanship; so also are the dragging weariness and the heartache of that

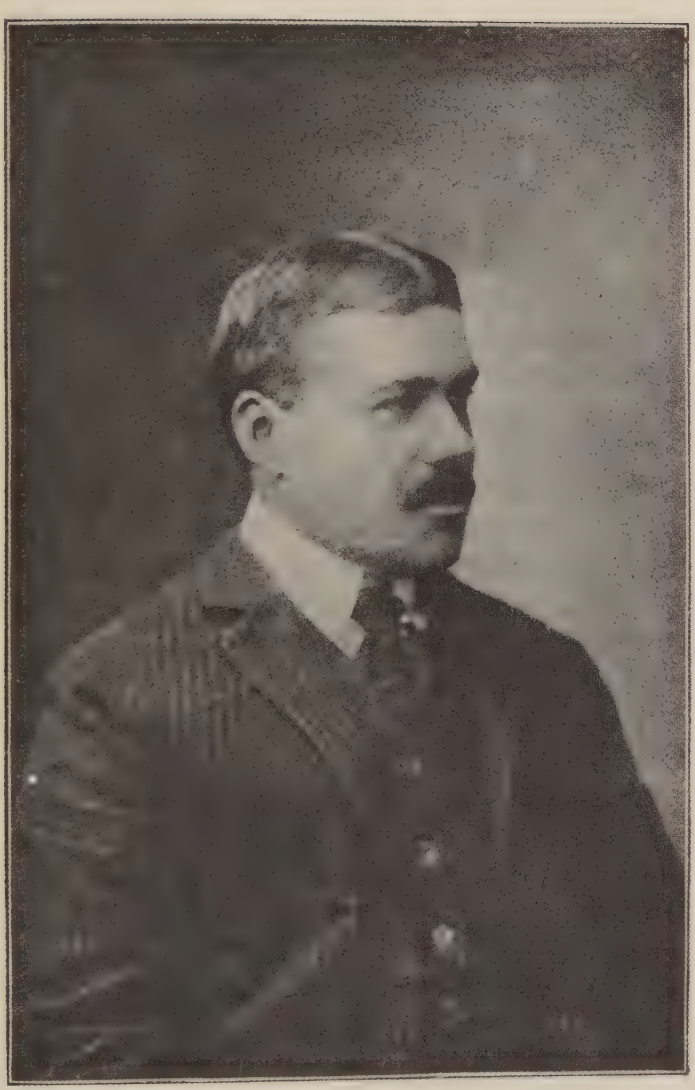
year in the divorce colony. But the book lacks finality. There is no good reason for supposing that the third marriage, the marriage of sympathy and pity, will turn out one whit better than the other two.

Regarding Mr. Churchill's place in American fiction, it is possible to speak with more confidence than in the case of most of his contemporaries. That he has a widespread popularity is a fact that cannot be disregarded, and this popularity instead of waning has remained a constant quantity. He builds his books solidly, as one builds a house upon a rock with the intention that it shall not soon be torn down. He has, moreover, the advantage of a careful style and a scrupulous regard for truth. There are some of us who are inclined to feel that he has been taken rather too seriously by the present generation, in much the same way that Mrs. Humphry Ward has been overrated by her contemporaries. Of the two writers, it seems a fairly safe prediction that Mr. Churchill has a rather better chance of maintaining his present level in the years to come. He is still young and his later work shows a real gain in the knowledge of what fiction as a serious literary form should mean.

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

THERE are certain novelists whose phenomenal popularity challenges us, almost like a blow in the face, and demands an explanation. Mr. Robert W. Chambers is a case in point. We have not at present a large number of writers who have made good their claim to a place among the born story tellers; but of these few, Mr. Chambers is one who, in the estimation of the big reading public, seems to have proved a clear title. For this reason it is distinctly worth while to examine the work of Mr. Chambers with an unsparing frankness that would seem unkind to a writer of less popular favor, and to ask ourselves, without prejudice or illusion, just what he has succeeded in accomplishing, wherein he has fallen short of his early promise, and why he has not attained that higher goal which has always seemed to lie so easily within his reach.

In the first place, it is worth while to rehearse briefly and to keep in mind just a few biographical details: that Mr. Chambers was born in Brooklyn, May 26, 1865; that he and Mr. Charles Dana Gibson were fellow-students at the Art Students'



ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

League in New York; that in 1886 he went to Paris and studied at the École des Beaux Arts and at Julian's for seven years, his paintings finding acceptance at the Salon when he was but twenty-four years of age. He returned to New York in 1893; and a glance over the old files of *Life*, *Truth* and *Vogue* reveals his activity at that time as an illustrator. But the story-writer's instinct, the riotous fertility of imagination that insisted on flashing endless motion pictures before his eyes at all times and in all places demanded a fuller and more rapid means of expression than that of palette and brush stroke. The tangible realities of his student's life in Paris formed the raw material for a first novel, *In the Quarter;* while the yet undisciplined extravagances of his imagination found outlet in the short stories of uncanny and haunting power that make up the volume entitled *The King in Yellow.* It was the cordial recognition accorded this second volume that decided Mr. Chambers's subsequent career.

To a critic attempting a conscientious and discriminating study of Mr. Chambers's work, the first and most salient feature is his productivity. In barely seventeen years he has produced thirty-six volumes, including four juvenile stories and a collection of verse. Furthermore, his uncommon versatility once found expression in a drama entitled *The Witch of Ellangowan,* written for Miss

Ada Rehan and produced at Daly's Theater. It is neither practicable nor advantageous to study in detail more than a fraction of these works; singling out such as clearly mark the author's several periods of transition and stand as significant landmarks of gain or loss in technique. But before taking up these separate volumes, it is well to get a general impression of Mr. Chambers's literary methods, his characteristic practice of the art he has chosen in preference to that for which he was trained.

The emphasis of position is deliberately laid upon the concluding phrase of the preceding paragraph. The disadvantage under which the art of fiction has always suffered is that there is demanded of it no such long period of probation, no such definite apprenticeship as are exacted from all the other arts. It is true that many a beginner in story writing is condemned, usually with justice, to months and years of disappointment; an augmenting collection of rejection slips; and the consignment, one by one, of treasured manuscripts to the waste-paper basket. On the other hand, it happens every now and then that a new writer breaks into print like thunder out of a clear sky, with scarcely any preliminary training and by sheer force of an inborn talent. But the important point is that, whether premature or belated, the success of the story writer

comes from self-tuition. There exists no Julian's to train the budding novelist, no salon to give a world-wide recognition to real genius. The case of Mr. Chambers himself is interesting and significant. Seven years seemed not too long a time to serve for the right to have a few sketches published in our illustrated magazines. But when one day it casually occurred to him to sit down at his desk and to turn the things he had seen into written pages, the result a few months later was the irrevocable black-and-white of a printed book. Of course, in one sense such an experience is high testimony to a writer's natural talent, and not merely justifies, but well-nigh demands his continuance along the same path. On the other hand, such an inborn and spontaneous vein of creative power is a handicap as well as an advantage. It minimizes the importance of self-discipline and of that mastery of technique which is to be acquired only at the price of many failures.

All this is by way of preface to the one obvious and all-pervading weakness in the writings of Mr. Chambers. For it is important to get this weakness clearly in mind before we recognize cordially his many distinctive talents. Some admirers of Mr. Chambers have spoken enthusiastically of his rare constructive ability and of the unerring instinct with which he brings his stories to the desired climax. To a great extent this is true,

if only we place the principal accent upon the word "instinct." What Mr. Chambers's literary methods are, the present writer does not know in detail; but a careful analysis leaves the impression that he allows his stories very largely to construct themselves, relying upon that inborn faculty for narrative which we have already so cordially granted him. For instance, the elementary principle of Economy of Means is a rule for which Mr. Chambers seems to have no use. He has found by experience that the public likes to listen to him; and so long as they listen, he sees no reason for curtailing to fifty words a sentence which, left to itself, flows along to upward of a hundred. In his latest books, he no more sees the objection to interrupting the progress of a plot by a few pages of unnecessary dialogue than in his earlier period he saw the harm of delaying progress with superfluous paragraphs of quite vivid and wonderful description.

In other words, the impression left by Mr. Chambers's work as a whole is that he has not chosen to study carefully and to practice the best technique of the recognized masters of modern fiction. He prefers to begin and to end a story where he pleases, regardless of the question whether this beginning and end coincide with those dictated by the best art. In a measure, this is rather curious, because of all the arts none is so

closely related to fiction as that of painting, none that should be a more unerring guide to the best methods of composition. And yet in his stories, Mr. Chambers over and over again interjects extraneous details which, if he had been thinking in terms of brush strokes and paint tubes, he would have known at once to lie far beyond the borders of his canvas. These criticisms of Mr. Chambers's methods are based not upon individual impressions but upon facts, easily to be demonstrated from the books themselves. Nevertheless, they are made hesitantly, because it is quite possible that Mr. Chambers has been wise in writing precisely as he does. It may be that his erratic, effervescent, irrepressible flow of invention would have become clogged and diverted under the trammels of a stricter technique. What he does possess and what must be acceded to him freely and generously are a graphic power of visualization that sets before you, with the lavishness of a glowing canvas, precisely the picture that he has in his mind's eye; an ability to handle crowds and give you the sense of the jostle and turmoil of busy streets, the tumult and uproar of angry throngs, the din and havoc of battle; and thirdly, he possesses to an exceptional degree the trick of conveying a sense of motion. You are caught, swept off your feet, and breathlessly carried onward by the irresistible rush and surge of his nar-

rative. Many another writer has succeeded in describing speed; few of them have been able so intensely to make you feel it; few of them have given the impression of the inexorable rapidity with which the tragedies of life sometimes succeed each other.

And, furthermore, a quality which must be conceded to Mr. Chambers in common with such specialists in the outdoor life as Stewart Edward White or Charles G. D. Roberts, is an enthusiastic and all-pervading love of nature—of wood and field and water, of hunting and fishing, of all creatures of the earth and air, large and small. There is not a story but what has in it some furred or feathered creature that plays a more or less prominent part in the structure; not a chapter that is quite lacking in the song of birds or the fragrance of flowers or the flutter of insect wings. And with all this is the unmistakable imprint of authority. You feel that Mr. Chambers may blunder in the color of a man's hair or the motive for a woman's action; but he is too good a naturalist to mistake the species of a beetle or a butterfly, or misname a wayside weed or a woodland creeper. The great majority of our society novelists confine themselves so largely to the artificial life of drawing-room and boudoir that we ought to be grateful to Mr. Chambers if only for the sake of the breath of open air and song and

sunshine that he never quite loses, even in the darkest and meanest of our city streets.

It will not be necessary, in order to arrive at a well-rounded estimate of Mr. Chambers's real value, to examine critically more than half a dozen of his books. An author's first published volume usually possesses a peculiar significance as a standard of measurement for what comes after. Therefore, *In the Quarter* cannot be disregarded. One's first impression in reading it is that of astonishment at its vividness; it is so unmistakably a series of pen drawings, of things actually seen and lived, a pellmell gathering of the humor and pathos, the gladness and the pain of the modern art student's life. One's second thought is that, while essentially modern in material, the book is curiously old-fashioned in structure, almost as destitute of coherence as *La Vie de Bohême* itself. There is not an episode that you wish to prune away—they are so frankly enjoyable for their own sake; but as for plot, with the best intentions in the world, one fails to extract anything more definite than this: An American art student, who drifts into quite the usual entanglement with a young girl of a rather better sort than the average Parisian model; an estrangement brought about by the American's inheritance of a fortune, and the interference of the French girl's jealous sister; and finally the unjustifiable and melodra-

matic murder of the American by the sister just as all misunderstandings have been cleared up and the wedding is arranged. In this book, in spite of certain crudities, the following points are to be noticed: Here at the very start, Mr. Chambers showed a rare power of description, a distinct ability at portraiture of such types as he really knew; and because the book was written under French influences, the slight structure that it possessed was logical—even the melodramatic ending was foreshadowed and structurally justifiable.

Following this novel come a succession of volumes which, with the exception of one or two negligible efforts, consist of collections of short stories: *The King in Yellow, The Maker of Moons* and *The Mystery of Choice.* Mr. Chambers has, at intervals since then, published other volumes of tales, such as *The Tree of Heaven,* and *Some Ladies in Haste;* but unquestionably, his fame as a writer of the short story will rest upon these earlier volumes. Widely as they differ in character and quality, ranging from painfully sinister horror-stories to fantasies light as rainbow bubbles, they all of them have one quality in common: A wanton unreality, a defiance of everything that, in our sober senses, we are accustomed to believe, coupled with a certain assumption of seriousness, an insistence upon little realistic details that force us for the time being to accept as

actual the most outrageous absurdities, and to vibrate, as responsively as a violin string, to the touch of the author's finger and the sweep of his imagination.

It would be easy to pick a dozen of these stories as characteristic examples of Mr. Chambers at the height of his fantastic mood. As a matter of personal preference, I would single out the story which gives its name to the volume entitled *The Maker of Moons*, for it runs the gamut of all the varied emotions that characterize these stories—the repulsion of tangible, physical ugliness, the dread of unguessed horror, the witchery of supernatural beauty, the pervading sense of invisible, warring forces of good and evil. We start with cold, prosaic details—a favorite trick of Mr. Chambers. The United States Treasury officials have reason to believe that an unscrupulous gang of counterfeiters have discovered a method of manufacturing gold, so adroitly that it defies chemical analysis, and they decide that these makers of "moonshine" gold must be suppressed. There is only one peculiarity about this gold—and herein lies the first suggestion of creepy repulsion—wherever a lump of the gold is found, there are pretty sure to be found also one or more curious, misshapen, crawling creatures, half-crab, half-spider, covered with long, thick, yellow hair, and suggestive of uncleanness and venom.

The headquarters of these counterfeiters is somewhere in the northern woods, in a region of peaceful trees and still waters. And the whole effect of the story is obtained by the swift series of transitions between the physical violence of a ruthless man-hunt and the ineffable charm and beauty of a dream-lady, who appears to the hero repeatedly and without warning, standing beside a magic fountain and talking to him of a mystic city beyond the Seven Seas and the Great River, "the river and the thousand bridges, the white peak beyond, the sweet-scented gardens, the pleasant noise of the summer wind, laden with bee music and the music of bells." It is hard, in a clumsy retelling of such gossamer-spun tales, to give the impression of anything more than a jumble of mad folly. Yet the tale itself leaves an insistent memory of supernatural beauty, seen vaguely through moonlight, and of the fulsome opulence of demon gold, distilling foully into writhing, crawling horrors.

Lorraine, *Ashes of Empire*, *The Red Republic* and *The Maids of Paradise*, though appearing at irregular intervals, from 1894 to 1903, belong together, for the twofold reason that they all four have the Franco-Prussian War as a setting, and dashing young Americans for their heroes. Of these four, *Ashes of Empire* seems best adapted for analysis, since it shows, perhaps the best of

any of them, the qualities and weaknesses of Mr. Chambers in this type of novel. It is essentially the type of the modern novel of adventure, the type made familiar by Stanley Weyman, Max Pemberton, Henry Seton Merriman and Richard Harding Davis—and on the whole, Mr. Chambers's treatment of the type may be compared not unfavorably with any one of these. He happens to know unusually well both the history and the topography of France during the period that he has chosen to treat; he attempts no ambitious character study, he takes no daring liberties with recorded facts; he is content to tell a series of rattling good stories that not only keep moving but keep you moving with them. And there is no doubt that he himself is having as much enjoyment in the writing as any of the readers have in the reading. And yet it is evident that this type of book is not what Mr. Chambers would have deliberately chosen as his favorite life work. One may venture to risk the conjecture that he would never have written these books at all had it not been for the sudden popularity, a decade ago, of the adventure novel, coupled with his own fatal facility for turning out pretty nearly any sort of story that he chooses to undertake. Had he cared more for his work, we should have had in these books characters less wooden and more like real people, and episodes more uniformly serious

and less apt to approach the border-line of farce. *Ashes of Empire* is in this respect typical. It deals with the Empress Eugénie's flight, the siege and the surrender of Paris. There are two young American war correspondents, who happened to be outside the Tuileries at an opportune time to aid two unknown young women to hoodwink the crowd and effect the Empress's safe retreat. These two war correspondents, partly by design, partly by good luck, succeed in tracing the young women to their home, abutting on the city's fortifications, learn that the girls live there quite alone, renting the upper apartments to lodgers, and keeping a bird shop on the ground floor, in which parrots, jackdaws and a tame lioness harmlessly romp together. The war correspondents promptly fall in love with the two sisters, rescue them from the villainous machinations of two German-Americans (who turn out to be Prussian spies), and after undergoing the usual allotment of hair-breadth escapes, marry and live happily ever after. But while the characterization is weak, and the plot conventional, the background is really alive. We feel the tension of a national crisis, the dread of approaching disaster, the scream of shells, and the wails of starvation, the despair of a people who know that both from within and without they have been betrayed. To this extent, at least, the book is a worthy piece of

work; and it is exasperating in the same way that so much of Mr. Chambers's work exasperates, because we feel that he might so easily have made it better.

Many a sincere friend of Mr. Chambers has frankly declared *Outsiders* to be his one great blunder. Yet it is a finer and more sincere piece of work than many of his successful volumes. Moreover, it throws some useful light upon his attitude, not so many years ago, toward publishers, critics and life in general in the city of New York. It is not surprising that the book failed to achieve popularity. He committed in it almost all the indiscretions which are supposed to bar the way to a big sale; he ridiculed American culture, American architecture and American social standing; and he rounded out the story with an ending which sinned doubly by being not only unhappy, but structurally unnecessary. Nevertheless, one cannot help liking the book; it is so vigorous, so cleverly satirical, and, in the main, so well written. The life of the self-styled Bohemian circles, the life of the petty artists, the minor poets, the second-rate scribblers of all sorts is, to be sure, largely done in caricature, but it is caricature of an easily recognized sort. And the background, though frankly painted by an outsider, and a hostile outsider at that, is vividly, unmistakably, aggressively New York. You cannot

at a single moment of the story forget your whereabouts, or imagine yourself in any other city in the world.

Far up the ravine of masonry and iron a beautiful spire, blue in the distance, rose from a Gothic church that seemed to close the great thoroughfare at its northern limit.

"That's Grace Church," said Oliver, with a little catch in his voice.

It was the first familiar landmark that he had found in the city of his boyhood—and he had been away only a dozen years. Suddenly he realized the difference between a city, in the Old World acceptance of the term, and the city before his eyes—this stupendous excrescence of naked iron, gaunt under its skin of paint, flimsily colossal, ludicrously sad—this half-begun, irrational, gaudy, dingy monstrosity—this temporary fair-ground, choked with tinsel, ill-paved, ill-lighted, stark, treeless, swarming, crawling with humanity.

In the decade that has since passed, Mr. Chambers has learned to make his characters, even when they have long resided abroad, more uniformly courteous regarding their expressed opinions of American cities and American customs. One wonders a little whether this is because he has succeeded in acquiring a taste for our ugly buildings and our noisy streets, or whether it is simply

a matter of expedient reticence. Be this as it may, one cannot read attentively his latest and most mature volumes, his present series of contemporary New York life, without observing that descriptive passages of city streets and buildings are conspicuously absent. The moment that he escapes from the city, the moment that he finds himself in the open once more, on the wide-spreading levels of Long Island, or the picturesque stretches of the Maine coast, or the Adirondacks, we get again that fertile vividness of landscape painting which was one of the great charms of his earlier books.

For the most part, however, one notices a great change in method in these later society novels that already include *The Fighting Chance*, *The Younger Set*, *The Firing Line* and *The Danger Mark*. He has begun to take himself much more seriously; he no longer gives you the impression of deliberately having fun with his characters and situations; he is trying quite sincerely to handle social and ethical problems of real importance—and what is more, to handle them in the only way that is worth while—namely, by using for his setting the present-day social life in the city and among the people that he best knows. And for these reasons, the recent work of Mr. Chambers must be judged more strictly than his earlier volumes. Because he has become

more ambitious, he must be held more closely to account for his deficiencies.

These four novels have the following points in common: The action is divided between the social whirl of New York City and the country homes of the fashionable set; the central interest in each of the four volumes is due to certain hereditary instincts or impulses which make it either inexpedient or impossible for a certain man and woman to marry. In two of the volumes, namely, *The Younger Set* and *The Firing Line*, they unwisely have married and the story itself largely hinges on problems raised subsequently by divorce. In *The Fighting Chance* and *The Danger Mark*, the problem is that of unfitness to marry, the only difference between the two volumes being that the one is the reverse of the other—the former presenting a case where the man inherits a craving for alcohol and the woman an abnormal instinct for the flattery and attentions of men, while in the latter it is the woman who is intemperate and the man whose gallantries are uncontrolled. Now it cannot be denied that these themes are good enough in themselves; and that, if properly handled with adequate knowledge of life and sincerity of purpose, they might have given us something worthy of standing as an American substitute for the Continental type of analytical novel.

And it is precisely for reasons of this sort that one becomes every now and then distinctly exasperated with Mr. Chambers—not because his work is bad, but because one feels that it falls just short of being something a great deal better. *The Fighting Chance* and *The Danger Mark* are easily the best works of this later period—so much better than the two divorce problem novels that the latter may be left out of consideration. You read along in *The Fighting Chance*, rather skeptically perhaps at the start, because of a conviction that it has been much overpraised by the general public. Then, little by little, you find it taking hold upon you because it has much of Mr. Chambers's earlier qualities and something new in addition—it has his pictorial vividness, his skilful light and shade, his rapidity of action, his mesmeric trick of making even the improbable seem quite a matter of course; and at the same time it reveals a new power of delineating character, of presenting us with people who are not merely types but individuals as well, people whose inward struggles and anxieties we feel a keen and growing desire to share. And then, all at once, we run up against a paragraph or a chapter that gives us a shock, because it seems so out of keeping with the rest of the picture, so clearly the sort of thing that people do not say or do. One charitably minded reader, who is at the same time

a sincere admirer of Mr. Chambers at his best, explains these occasional notable lapses, at least so far as the dialogue is concerned, on the ground that the author at such times has contented himself with merely giving, as it were, the bare scenario,—with telling what his characters said, without taking the time or trouble to work up the still more important question of just how they really said it. In other words, the simplest explanation of the unevenness of style in *The Fighting Chance* is that Mr. Chambers, to borrow one of his own titles, permits himself at times to be A Young Man in a Hurry.

But the real reason why Mr. Chambers's studies of American life at times strike a note that we feel to be off the key is this: His portraits of men are always a little stronger, surer, more convincing than those of his women. Study them all carefully from first to last, from his roughly blocked-in women of the Latin Quarter and the vaporous dream-maidens of his early fantasies, down to the designedly flesh-and-blood women of his latest book, and you feel that in varying degrees they all have one little defect; they are all of them what men like to think women to be, rather than the actual women themselves; in their actions they live up to man's expectation of what they are going to do next rather than to woman's inalienable right to do the unexpected and il-

logical thing. Take, for example, *The Fighting Chance;* in substance it amounts to this: A young woman already pledged to a man enjoying all the advantages of wealth and position, one day meets another man, under the shadow of a heavy disgrace due to his intemperate habits. They are guests at the same house party, they are thrown much together, and within forty-eight hours she falls, unresisting, into his arms, and yields her lips as readily as any servant girl. Heredity, says the author; the girl cannot help it; the women in her family have for generations been all that they ought not to be. Nevertheless, the reader retorts, the girl does not become "all that she ought not to be." During the weeks that follow there is many a venturesome scene, many a dialogue between the two that skirts the edge of impropriety; but in spite of heredity, the lady never quite loses her head; and after they separate at the close of the summer season, and the months slip by, and she knows quite well that the man she loves is drinking himself to death, when a word from her would stop him, she continues to wear the other man's large diamond ring and play her part in the social whirl; and only after the lapse of many months does it occur to her that she can effect the salvation of a human soul without in the least endangering her own reputation, by merely calling him up on the telephone and having a five min-

utes' chat. Now, this is not said with the object of belittling Mr. Chambers's work; the greater part of it is good—surprisingly good when one considers that he is a romanticist suddenly turned psychologue. Only it does not seem that a real woman could have acted in quite that way. She either would have flung discretion to the wind and done all sorts of mad things earlier in the game and thrown the blame upon heredity; or else she would, from the very beginning, have had sufficient self-control to keep her lips her own for somewhat longer than forty-eight hours.

It is always an interesting question—interesting largely because it is in a measure unanswerable—what position is going to be assigned by a later generation to any one of our contemporary novelists? As regards Mr. Chambers, there are just a few predictions which may be made without hesitation. As a writer of short stories, he has produced at least half a dozen that deserve to rank among the best that American writers have produced; and no future collection of representative short stories can claim to be complete if it happens to neglect his name. As a novelist, he has to face the handicap that must accompany too great an adaptability. With rare exceptions, the great names in fiction are those of writers whose work throughout has been fairly homogeneous—writers who have known from the beginning precisely

what sort of books they wanted to write, and whose volumes have differed in degree and not in kind. Mr. Chambers has veered, and apparently with intention, in accordance with the breeze of popular demand: first to the French historical novel, then to the Civil War story, and finally, when the demand was sufficiently emphatic, to the contemporary society novel. In this last field, there is still a hope that Mr. Chambers will at length find himself: and the fact that the last of the four books is the best and most sustained and most honest piece of work that his later manner has produced affords solid ground for the hope that he may have still better and maturer volumes yet to come. Nevertheless, the accumulated experience of the ages has inculcated a wise distrust of the literary weathercock.

ELLEN GLASGOW

In glancing backward over the twelve or fifteen years during which Miss Ellen Glasgow has been practising her careful, deliberate, finely conceived art, and patiently striving, not without an occasional blunder, toward her present mastery of technique, one feels that, all things considered, she has not yet had in full measure the generous, widespread and serious recognition to which she is entitled. Some of her volumes, to be sure, have enjoyed an encouraging popularity; and in many quarters she has had cordial critical appreciation. And yet, at best, it seems distinctly disproportioned to a talent which stands in the forefront of American women novelists, outranking on the one side Mrs. Atherton, as far as it outranks Mrs. Wharton on the other,—a talent which sees life, if not more deeply than the author of *The House of Mirth*, at least through a far wider angle; a talent which replaces the riotous unrestraint of the author of *Ancestors* with that greater strength of logical purpose and symmetry of form.

Now in order to make clear the sound critical

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ground for assigning so high a place to the author of *The Deliverance* and *The Miller of Old Church*, it seems not merely worth while but even obligatory to examine rather carefully her understanding and her use of the technique of form. Miss Glasgow's creed in fiction is obviously that of the realists,—although her adherence to it is not so rigid as to preclude her from an occasional excursion into romanticism. Her novels are not only realistic but, like the novels of Frank Norris, Robert Herrick and David Graham Phillips, they are, in the best sense of the term, Zolaesque; that is to say, they have an epic sweep and comprehension, an epic sense of the surge of life and the clash of multitudinous interests. This particular type of novel is so seldom successfully achieved in English that, although there has been occasion to speak of it more than once already in the present volume, it seems desirable, even at the risk of repetition, to call to mind once more just what are its characteristic features.

The epic novel, like the epic poem, must have a twofold theme, a specific human story and a big general problem—the wrath of Achilles and the Trojan War; the expulsion from Eden and the Fall of Man; the fate of Uncle Tom and the whole problem of slavery. And the very essence of this epic quality lies in the ability to tell the specific, central human story, and hold and stir

you with the pathos and the tragedy of it, and yet all the while keep before you the realization that this specific story is only an isolated case of a general and widespread condition; that Achilles brooding in his tent is only a symbol of the pervading wrath and sorrow and desolation begotten by war; that the empty cabin of Uncle Tom is only a symbol of the cruelty, the broken ties, the inhumanity attendant upon slavery. It is a curious fact that Mrs. Stowe, probably without any conscious understanding of technique, produced an almost perfect epic novel according to principles that were destined to be formulated fully half a century later. And it is equally curious that the first American woman since Mrs. Stowe to succeed in writing a genuine epic novel should also have chosen a similar setting and a similar theme.

To state the case more correctly, it is curious that the first woman among our modern writers to achieve this type of novel should have happened to be a Southern woman. Because, since Miss Glasgow happens by birth and education to have a knowledge of Virginian scenes and people beyond that of other parts of the world, she has simply been obeying the most elementary principle of good technique when she chooses for her setting the region that she knows best; while such a volume as *The Wheel of Life*, in which the scene is laid in New York, is to be classed, in spite of

much that is good, among the number of the author's blunders. One feels in this New York story as though Miss Glasgow were slightly out of her element, as though she lacked sympathy even for the best of the characters in it, and frankly disapproved of the others. It is even more difficult for a woman than for a man to attain the attitude of strict impersonality which is demanded by the highest rules of modern construction—and herein, one feels, lies one of Miss Glasgow's failings. She could not, if she would, help showing us how her heart goes out to certain favorite characters, young and old, white and black alike—nor would we have it otherwise, because in her affection for these people, whom she understands so profoundly, lies the secret of the abiding charm which they in turn possess for us.

Human stories, strong, tender, high-minded, her volumes undeniably are. But what one remembers about them, even after the specific story has faded from the mind, is their atmosphere of old-fashioned Southern courtesy and hospitality, of gentle breeding and steadfast adherence to traditional standards of honor. She has dealt with special skill with the anomalous and transitory conditions of society that followed the close of the war—the breaking down of old barriers; the fruitless resistance of conservatism to the new tendencies of social equality; the frequent pa-

thetic struggles to keep up a brave show in spite of fallen fortunes; the proud dignity that accepts poverty and hardship and manual labor with unbroken spirit. Such books as *The Battle-Ground*, *The Deliverance*, *The Voice of the People*, are in the best sense of the term novels of manners, which will be read by later generations with a curious interest because they will preserve a record of social conditions that are changing and passing away, more slowly yet quite as relentlessly as the dissolving vapors of a summer sunset.

In order, however, to understand on the one hand just how she uses her technique, and on the other how she succeeds in giving such poignant reality to her people and her scenes, it is necessary to examine in somewhat more detail at least a portion of her books. And *The Battle-Ground*, as one of her earlier works, and also one that reaches back historically to the time of the Civil War, forms a convenient starting point. It is besides one of the most obvious instances of Miss Glasgow's characteristic method of epic structure. In the first place, it deals with the wide, general theme suggested by the title—and in this wider sense the central figure is not a person but a State, the State of Virginia; and the story is the story of that State before, during and immediately after the four years of devastating struggle. But more specifically *The Battle-Ground* is

the intimate history of one Southern family, the Lightfoots, or rather of one member of that family, Dan Montjoy, whose mother, old Major Lightfoot's only daughter, had made a runaway match with a hot-headed, mean-natured scamp, who cost her a brief misery and an early death. Dan Montjoy comes naturally by his hot temper, but for the most part he is a true Lightfoot, and the idol of his grandfather's old age. But there comes a day when youthful impetuosity leads Dan into certain foolish escapades that his grandfather takes too seriously; angry, unforgettable words are exchanged, and the young man goes forth penniless, to fight his way in the world alone, leaving home, friends and the girl he loves. What he might have made of himself under other conditions is a question that Miss Glasgow does not even touch upon; but it happens that this quarrel occurs on the eve of the Civil War; Dan's secession from the family circle coincides with the South's withdrawal from the Union. And so, throughout the rest of this powerful war novel, we see a double struggle waged upon a double battle-ground—the struggle of a family of federal States at war with each other; and the struggle of a human being for independence of the ties of blood. And in the end, when the South as a whole is brought to accept defeat, Dan has learned still another and more personal lesson, and returns

once more, wiser and happier with the sober happiness of maturity, to those at home who have never ceased to hope for his coming.

Similarly, in *The Deliverance* there is a double significance of title and of plot. "After the battle come the vultures," says a Union soldier in *The Battle-Ground*—and in a broad, general way, *The Deliverance* may be said to symbolize the sufferings of the South in the years immediately following the war, when so many of those who had constituted the wealth and pride and aristocracy of the country saw their remaining possessions wrested from them by corruption and by fraud. Christopher Blake is only a single instance of this widespread injustice and robbery. He has seen his father die, broken in body and in mind; has seen the magnificent estate, that had been for two centuries the property of the Blakes, sold at auction and bought in for a beggarly sum by Bill Fletcher, his father's former overseer. Nothing can be done in a legal way; for Fletcher has been careful to see that all documents and account books that might serve as evidence against him were destroyed by fire. Christopher, a mere boy, with a crippled mother and two sisters on his hands, finds himself turned adrift, with no refuge save the overseer's former cabin and a few acres of tobacco fields, down in one corner of the estate which should have been his own. The mother,

paralyzed and blind, is transferred, all unaware of the change, one day when she is being carried out for her accustomed airing. Knowing nothing of the fall of the Confederacy, of the death of Lincoln, of the freedom of the slaves, she lives on in a world of her own imaginings, nurtured on an elaborate tissue of lies, daily issuing orders to an army of slaves which no longer exists, and delicately partaking of broiled chicken and sipping rare old port, while her son and daughters exist painfully on hoe-cake and fat bacon. Such is the tragic and impressive symbolism by which Miss Glasgow pictures to us the contrast between the hopes and the humiliations of the South. And in the story of the Blakes we see not merely a single family tragedy, but behind it an entire country given over to desolation, with countless estates passing into unworthy hands, countless impoverished families taking up unaccustomed burdens and cherishing in their hearts a mortal bitterness because of the dead dream of the Confederacy that refuses to be forgotten. But in the case of Christopher Blake there is another and more specific story. As a boy, his first mad impulse after being turned from his home, was to murder Fletcher; but the impulse once checked has turned to a smoldering hatred, a fixed and secret determination for revenge. Fletcher has two grandchildren, a girl and a boy. The girl,

Maria, marries and goes abroad, before Christopher has had time to determine whether his feeling for her is hatred or love. Toward the boy, Will, he has but one feeling, and that is a steadfast longing to use him as an instrument of vengeance. The boy is the one living thing that old Fletcher loves; therefore, by making him a liar, a coward and a drunkard, Christopher feels that he is paying back with interest the wrongs the Blakes have suffered. He never once realizes the unworthiness of his own conduct until Maria, after some years of marriage and widowhood, returns home, and they meet once more and realize the feeling they had cherished as boy and girl needs only a word to make it flame into love and not hatred. But Christopher has himself done a vulture's deed, in accomplishing the ruin of Maria's brother; and when the lad in a drunken frenzy kills his grandfather, Christopher, realizing his own moral responsibility, aids the other to escape and gives himself up as the murderer. Deliverance finally comes, so the book seems to preach—deliverance of the land from vultures like old Fletcher, deliverance of men like Christopher from the curse of their own mad deeds—but neither the one nor the other may be hurried; they come only with patience, in the fullness of time.

There are two other volumes by Miss Glasgow,

separated by an interval of nearly a decade, which nevertheless deserve to be analyzed together, because of the interesting contrast they afford: *The Voice of the People* and *The Romance of a Plain Man.* Throughout all of her books, one notices a theme to which Miss Glasgow reverts again and again, with never-flagging interest, and that is the theme of unequal marriages. Under the changed conditions of the reconstruction period it was inevitable that the old distinctions of race and breeding, the old prejudices against honest toil and industry should be to some extent modified; and that the daughters of impoverished families should not in all cases think that they were stooping if they wedded brave and honorable men whose fathers perhaps had been mere plain tillers of the soil. This problem, in its various aspects, Miss Glasgow has approached over and over again; but it is only in the two books now under discussion and to some extent in her latest and maturest volume, *The Miller of Old Church,* that she has frankly made it the central theme. Far apart as they are in other respects—since *The Voice of the People* is not without crudities of construction, while *The Romance of a Plain Man* is with one exception Miss Glasgow's finest achievement—the two books offer a curious parallel of plot for very nearly the first half of their development. Nicholas Burr and Ben Starr are

both small, barefoot, not over-clean boys when they first meet, in the one case, Eugenia Battle, in the other Sally Mickleborough, spick and span and freshly starched—and in each case the small girl makes the small boy exceedingly uncomfortable by declaring that she cannot play with him because he is "common." In each case the childish insult fires a latent ambition; Nicholas Burr confides to kindly old Judge Bassett his secret hope of some day becoming a judge; and Ben Starr similarly owns to General Bolingbroke, who happens to be president of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad, his own determination to work his way up eventually to the presidency of that same road. In each case the boy's ambition both amuses and pleases the busy man, and in each case the boy's education is cared for, his way made smooth, and the first steps toward his ultimate goal are guided by a wise and protecting hand. And in the later book Sally Mickleborough is brought to acknowledge, precisely as Eugenia Battle acknowledges in the earlier, that "common" was a mistaken and an unjust word, and that she is glad and proud to give her heart and hand to the man who has already achieved so much for her sake. But here the two books part company. In each of them the pride of the girl's family forms an almost insurmountable barrier; in each of them there is another man who by birth,

fortune and education seems expressly designed for the girl's husband. In the earlier book Miss Glasgow decides that between Nick Burr and Eugenia Battle there is too great a gulf ever to be bridged over even by love; a stray scrap of scandal touching him, too hastily believed in by her, estranges them permanently; she marries the man in her own class, while he goes on doggedly climbing the rungs of the political ladder, to his final goal as governor of the State. The voice of the people, through the ballot, has given him his political ambition; the voice of the people, through the tongue of scandal, robbed him of married happiness; the voice of the people, through the mad frenzy of a mob, bent upon lynching a negro whom he, as governor, has sworn to give a fair trial, robs him of his life. And the woman lives on, in a marriage that has brought neither joy nor sorrow, finding her only real emotion in the cares of motherhood.

The Romance of a Plain Man is a book as much bigger and stronger as a decade of steady growth can well make it. To begin with, Miss Glasgow has realized that such a story, concerning itself mainly with the inward growth of a man's character, has everything to gain and nothing to lose by being seen through the man's eyes. Therefore, she tells it in the first person. Secondly, she realizes that when two people care for each other

with the fierce, unreasoning passion either of Nick and Eugenia or of Ben and Sally, they are not likely to let either small obstacles or great ones come between them; that they will brush aside entreaties, warnings and commands, and take their chances of being either supremely happy or utterly miserable. In the marriage of Ben Starr and Sally Mickleborough the author, if we rightly understand her, wishes to show how difficult it is for a man sprung from a humble and rather vulgar source to understand the finer feelings of those more gently born. For Sally's sake Ben Starr wants wealth and education and power; and for her sake he wins them, rapidly, surely and with apparent ease. He wants them first to prove to her that he is not "common"; and afterward, having won her in defiance of her family and her social world, he continues to strive for more money, more power, more positions of trust, always with a fixed idea that they will bring her greater happiness. And here is where he makes his one great mistake, that almost wrecks their married life in mid-course. He does not realize that his absorption in the big game of finance leaves him little time even to think of his wife, and none at all to place at her service. Because the obvious difference between himself and the men in Sally's own class is money and position and education, he makes the natural mistake of think-

ing that the attainment and possession of these things is in itself the key to social equality, the one thing essential to his happiness and hers. And the last and most important lesson in his whole course of self-education he is slow in learning—that the essential thing does not lie in these achievements but behind them—it lies in a man's power to mold his own character until he is capable of attaining his goal. It is not a bank account, nor a directorship in a railway, nor social recognition, nor a knowledge of the Odes of Horace that in themselves win and hold the love of a woman like Sally Mickleborough; but without the energy and persistence to compass these things, Ben Starr would not have been the kind of man to win her. But having once won her, though he should lose his money, forget his Latin, find himself under a social cloud, she is the sort of woman who will cling all the more loyally—and with feminine illogic be the happier for serving him. This lesson Ben Starr might have learned early in their married life, during temporary reverses, when for some weeks Sally is slowly nursing him back to health after a desperate illness, and incidentally earning their daily bread with her own frail, unaccustomed hands. Had he been less of a "plain" man, and gifted with a little more subtlety, he would have seen that for these few weeks they were nearer to true happiness than

at any time before. But as a matter of fact he does not see, but goes on toiling, amassing, reaching out for more power, more fame, and year by year approaching his boyhood's ambition, the presidency of the Great South Midland and Atlantic Railroad. And at last it is only under the stress of a great sorrow and a greater fear; only when he sees his wife's life trembling in the balance, that this essentially plain man receives enlightenment, and realizes that the path to happiness may lie through the deliberate sacrifice of a life-long ambition.

Such in brief is the substance of *The Romance of a Plain Man*, which at the time of its publication two years ago was easily Miss Glasgow's most thoughtful, most mature and altogether biggest novel. It is a peculiarly American novel, since it symbolizes with a subtlety that is essentially feminine and a force that is almost virile the practical limitations of the doctrine that all men are born free and equal. It was quite natural that, in reading it, one should say: In this book Miss Glasgow has come to full maturity; she may give us many other volumes worthy of a place beside it, but surely nothing better or stronger! But in *The Miller of Old Church* she has climbed to a still higher level, because never before has she succeeded in being at once so pre-eminently local and so universal in her appeal. Old Church

deserves to become one of those historic landmarks in fiction, with a physiognomy and an individuality as unmistakable as George Eliot's St. Oggs, and Thomas Hardy's Wessex. Yet the underlying problem, while presenting a certain surface newness, is in reality not peculiar to Old Church, or to Virginia, or to the New South, but is as old as civilization itself. It is new to this extent only: that the specific conditions which determine its episodes are of recent origin, forming a definite stage in the slow transition in Southern social and economic life that began with the reconstruction period and is not yet ended. But in its essence Miss Glasgow's theme is nothing more nor less than that of the universal and inevitable struggle of the lower classes to rise, and the jealousy of caste that would hold them back if it could—and it is precisely the universality of the theme, studied under vividly local conditions, that gives to the book a large degree of its vitality and strength. The central human story of *The Miller of Old Church* has to do with the complex fortunes of Molly Merryweather, the illegitimate daughter of Janet Merryweather and Jonathan Gay, both of whom have been dead many years before the opening of the story. Janet Merryweather belonged to that humble and despised division of the white race in the South which even the negroes felt at liberty to look down upon; " before the war one

hardly ever heard of that class, it was so humble and unpresuming." Jonathan Gay, on the contrary, was of the aristocracy; the Gays of Jordan's Journey were easily the dominant social power of the neighborhood. At heart Jonathan sincerely loved Janet; he had meant to deal with her honestly, and he would have been glad to make reparation by marrying her. But it was at this crucial time that Angela Gay, Jonathan's widowed sister-in-law, came to make her home with him. Now Angela was one of those frail, ephemeral, flower-like women, who keep their family, friends and medical adviser in a state of chronic anxiety, and tyrannize over the home circle with a strength born of their weakness. In fact, it was tacitly understood that Angela was not long for this world, and that everything and everybody must be sacrificed in order to spare her agitation and guard against a strain upon her dangerously fluttering heart. In a vague way, Angela knew about Jonathan's irregularities of life; but according to the standards of her station and her epoch they were matters which a woman of refinement could not allow to be mentioned in her presence: "it was part of her sweetness that she never faced an unpleasant fact until it was literally thrust upon her notice." Consequently when Jonathan tried gently to break to her the idea that he was half-inclined to marry

Janet, Angela made it plain to him that for a Gay so to demean himself would be equivalent to a death blow to her. Janet's shame, insanity and early death distressed Angela in a vague way; but marriage would have been something a thousand times worse, a stupendous, unimaginable calamity. So Jonathan, not dreaming that Angela would outlive him, contented himself with leaving a secret bequest and a paper acknowledging Molly as his daughter,—all of which was to be made public only when the girl should reach the age of twenty-one. He did not foresee that the belated revelation would fall all the more heavily, because of the delay, upon the fragile woman to whom he had sacrificed his own happiness. Now, at the opening of the story all this is ancient history: Molly is on the threshold of womanhood. She has ripened into great beauty and is eagerly sought after by the young men of the new order, —the order, as one character phrases it, "that is rapidly forging to the surface and pushing us dilapidated aristocrats out of the way,"—but by no one more eagerly than by Abel Revercomb, the miller of Old Church. Now it happens that Jonathan Gay the younger, Angela's only son, after long years of absence in the North, at last comes to Jordan's Journey, "to see for himself how she can stand it." Almost the first person he meets is Molly; and her beauty and tragic history kindle

so quick an interest that ancient wrongs seem to have a prospect of being at last set right. And so they might have been, in spite of Molly's avowed hatred of men, but for the fatal circumstance that before meeting Molly he had lost his way while taking a short-cut across lots, had been set on his right path again by Blossom Revercomb, and learned that "not his philosophy, but the little brown mole on a woman's cheek stood for destiny." Jonathan is a true Gay by nature; and "a Gay will go on ogling the sex as long as he is able to totter back from the edge of the grave." All the time that he is openly paying court to Molly Merryweather and goading the miller into sullen jealousy, he is secretly meeting Blossom Revercomb, the miller's sister, and the old-time tragedy bids fair to be re-enacted. There has been an ancient feud between the Gays and the Revercombs,—in fact, it is current gossip that the shot which killed the elder Jonathan ten years earlier was fired by Uncle Abner Revercomb, who had never been quite sound in mind since the old days when the sweetheart of his youth, Janet Merryweather, was lost to him; and when he learns of the clandestine meetings between his niece and the younger Jonathan, he takes the law once more into his own hands, and by the death of another Gay squares a long-standing account.

So much of the bare plot of *The Miller of Old*

Church it has seemed necessary to tell in detail, in order to understand the symbolic meaning behind it. Of the subordinate stories, the secondary interests, the complex, interwoven threads that make this volume a richly embroidered piece of living tapestry, it is impossible to take notice here, without risk of blurring outlines and confusing motives. It seems almost a pity that it is necessary to lay such special stress upon the bare skeleton of a book which, considered as a human story rather than an ethical problem, finds its main interest less in the sheer narrative than in the atmosphere of a unique locality and the intimate concerns of a group of people whom we grow to love in a very personal way on account of their stirling merits or rare whimsicalities. But it was necessary to get the bare framework of the book clearly in mind, and for the following reason: without so doing, we could not understand the masterly way in which Miss Glasgow has here once again employed the epic method. In the broadest sense this book is not so much the history of Molly Merryweather as it is the story of the New South. The various factors that tend either to hasten or retard development are personified one by one in the several characters of this little local drama. In Angela, for instance, we have the incarnate spirit of the old-time Southern aristocracy, with its pride and its traditions,—sorely stricken since

the war; moribund, yet still clinging to life with the amazing tenacity of chronic invalidism. In the older Jonathan, we have the bygone type of the reckless, devil-may-care, hot-blooded Southerner, who at any cost would maintain his family standards and traditions; and in the younger Jonathan and Abel Revercomb we have respectively the new dignity of labor and the new and broader tolerance of gentle breeding. And lastly, if we read Miss Glasgow's purpose rightly, we have in Molly Merryweather herself the future solution of the social problem. In her origin and in her character, Molly represents a mixture of two natures, a compromise between the upper class and the lower, combining the better qualities of each; furthermore, she typifies a social intermingling which, a generation earlier, was not to be thought of, but which to-day, owing to changed conditions, has come more and more to be tolerated. In other words the stigma of the girl's illegitimacy stands as a symbol of the social ostracism of the poorer whites, even for many years after the war; and her belated recognition by her father's people, in consequence of his posthumous acknowledgment of her, symbolizes the reluctance with which the social barriers begin to yield. And even Molly's marriage has its deeper, hidden significance: even had Jonathan lived, she would not have married him, the representative of

an effete social code; she would inevitably have taken the man whom she did take, the sturdy Miller of Old Church,—because the younger society of the New South is destined more and more to recruit itself from the vigorous ranks of the rising democracy. Such at least is what Miss Glasgow seems to have set herself to say,—and in this it is not easy for the reader to misunderstand her; for she has said it with a courage, a clearness and a strength of conviction that make it easily her best book, her wisest book, the book that amply justifies the most sanguine prophecies of those who have had an abiding faith in her.

DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

In any critical analysis of the life work of the late David Graham Phillips, it is well to recognize frankly at the outset that he has been a rather important figure in the development of American fiction in recent years. We could name on the fingers of one hand the contemporary novelists who, like Mr. Phillips, have devoted themselves to depicting and studying the big ethical and social problems of their own country and generation, and doing it in a broad, bold, comprehensive way, with a certain epic sweep and magnitude. And among these few none was more deeply in earnest than Mr. Phillips, none strove more patiently to do his work in the best, most forceful, most craftsman-like manner. Having made these concessions, we are free to recognize that his results fell somewhat behind his intentions, that with all his industry he developed his technique rather slowly, and that while just a few of his novels are of a quality which no serious student of present-day fiction can afford to neglect, a large proportion of the remainder may conveniently be set aside as merely tending to increase the bulk of a critical

DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

analysis without contributing any light of real importance.

Now, in saying that Mr. Phillips was slow in acquiring the technique of construction, it behooves a critic to define rather carefully just wherein he showed himself defective. It certainly was not due to any lack of willingness or ability to practise infinite pains. On the contrary, the habit of making the act of writing a slow and conscientious toil grew upon him year by year. Few novelists of his degree of success have accepted adverse criticism in a more tolerant spirit; but there was one thing that he resented, and that was the charge of careless haste. "People sometimes say that I write too fast," he protested not long before his death. "They said so about my *Light-Fingered Gentry*. They don't know anything about it! I don't believe any one ever wrote more slowly and laboriously. Every one of my books was written at least three times——" He paused a moment, then added in correction, "And when I say *three times*, it really means nine times, on account of my system of copying and revision." When once under full headway in a book, he worked immoderately, producing an actual bulk of material far in excess of what was needed for the limits of the story. "I have writer's cramp every spring," he said with a laugh. As he became better acquainted with the characters and

situations in a book, his great difficulty lay in confining himself to such details as were strictly relevant to his central purpose. He was hampered by knowing too much about his people, their habits of life and methods of thought. They were all the time taking matters into their own hands, and insisting upon his setting down upon paper all sorts of happenings quite extraneous to the story. According to his own estimate, he usually ended by discarding, not only in paragraphs and episodes, but also in whole chapters, from two to three times as much as he retained in the published volume.

Nor are his faults of construction due to a lack of acquaintance with the best methods of the modern schools of fiction, abroad as well as at home. There are certain qualities in his later volumes, such as *Old Wives for New* and *The Second Generation*, which are to be explained only through the influence of the best French realism—qualities which, on the one hand, are not the result of a conscious and deliberate imitation; but on the other, cannot possibly have been an independent and spontaneous creation. The broad, Zolaesque sweep of phrase and action, the sense of jostling crowds and ceaseless activity, the endless panorama of city streets, the whole trick of treating humanity in ranks and battalions, as though the crowd were a natural unit of measurement,—these

are things which Mr. Phillips learned to do as just a few other American writers, Frank Norris, for instance, and Robert Herrick, have learned to do them: and necessarily he must have studied at the fountain head. Indeed, his whole conception of what a novel should be was French rather than Anglo-Saxon. When one discussed with him about theories of fiction he would admit frankly, on the one hand, that he had small use for such artificial devices for giving unity to a series of volumes as Balzac's scheme of the *Comédie Humaine* or Zola's complicated family tree of the Rougon-Macquart. But he did insist upon seeing every human story as a cross-section of life; and by a cross-section of life he did not mean a little local slice carefully measured to fit the dimensions of the particular story he happened to be telling. On the contrary, if he was narrating the simple love affair of a boy and girl in some small town of the Middle West, he was always conscious, even though he had no need of bringing this out in the story, that there was between that boy and girl and all the other people in that town an inevitable and all-pervading human relationship; that that town was not an isolated community, but was itself only a link in the vast network of social and industrial life stretching over the wide continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with endless miles of railroad intersecting it, with a

centralized government, a President and Congress at Washington and with countless lines of steamers keeping it in touch with the other world powers. All this helps in a measure to show what to Mr. Phillips was a very vivid actuality. And of course the writer who always sees each little human happening, not as an isolated incident but as a detail in a tremendous and universal scheme, necessarily has a wider outlook upon life and necessarily communicates to his readers a similar impression of bigness and of vitality.

This brings us directly to the question: Why is it that so many of Mr. Phillips's books contain more of promise than of fulfilment? Why is it that, starting as they do with big ethical problems and a broad epic treatment, they are so apt at the end to leave rather the impression of having given us an isolated and exceptional human story than of having symbolized some broad and universal principle? The answer, I think, is simply this: that there was a curious anomaly in the manner in which Mr. Phillips's mind worked when in quest of the germ idea of a new story. In spite of the fact that his instinct led him to write purpose novels, and that his interest in social and economic problems was in some respects keener than his interest in people; yet, according to his own admission, no story ever began to shape itself in his mind in the form of an abstract principle,

an ethical doctrine. Reversing the usual process followed by writers of the epic type, he always started from a single character or episode and built from these,—sometimes indeed from nothing more definite than a face glimpsed for a moment in a crowd. A striking case in point is the origin that he assigned to one of the novels left unpublished at the time of his death. The theme of this story was the outgrowth of Mr. Phillips's deep interest in the economic independence of the modern woman, and more especially in the peculiar dangers and temptations which beset her, as contrasted with the more sheltered lives of her mother and grandmother. He had been deeply stirred by recent statistics regarding the influx of refined young Southern women into New York, so many of them fated to be swept under by the surge of city life. He wanted to know whether such a girl could, by her own efforts, struggle up, out of the depths, to a position of independence and social standing. Such, in substance, is the longest book that Mr. Phillips ever wrote, a book that in the form in which he left it ran to considerably more than three hundred thousand words. The title of the book has not yet been made public; but it is probably safe to conjecture that it is the volume which he intended to call *Susan*. At all events, it is utterly unlike any of his previous efforts, and the author himself confessed that it

baffled his powers of self-criticism. But, like all his other books, it received its first impetus, not from economics, but from a trivial incident: namely, a passing glimpse of a young woman seated in a wagon.

The incident in question occurred when the author was a lad of fourteen. It was in a Western town, where he chanced to be staying at the time; and the face of the young woman in the farm-wagon haunted him long afterward. It was a beautiful face, a face indicating breeding and culture, but it bore the stamp of dumb, hopeless tragedy. As he stood gazing at her, a gaunt, elderly man, rugged and toil-stained, with the hall-mark of the well-to-do farmer plainly visible upon him, climbed to the seat beside her, gathered up the reins and drove off. Mr. Phillips, boy though he was, noticed how the girl shrank and whitened as her companion's shoulder touched her. He heard the girl's story afterward. She belonged to a family of local prominence; but there had been a scandal, sordid, notorious, unforgettable. The girl herself was probably the one person in the community who did not know the facts. She could not understand why her people were shunned socially, nor why they welcomed the chance of providing for her by marriage with an illiterate but prosperous old farmer, who lived at a desirable distance from town. The girl's story

has nothing to do with Mr. Phillips's novel, but the suffering on her face was his inspiration after the lapse of a quarter-century.

It is the logical result of Mr. Phillips's method of working from the concrete to the abstract, from the specific to the general, that his big underlying principle, whatever it may be, is never personified with that graphic visualization that makes it everywhere and at all times loom up portentously, as, for instance, in Zola's *L'Argent*, the Bourse looms up, in *Le Ventre de Paris*, the Halles, in *L'Assommoir*, the Wine-shop, like so many vast symbolic monsters wreaking their malignant pleasure upon mankind. In Mr. Phillips's books one feels the ethical purpose far more vaguely; he is always stimulating, he sets us thinking deeply over big problems—most deeply, perhaps, when he most strongly antagonizes us; but it is difficult to say with precision, or, at all events, to say within the limits of ten words just what principle any one book of his stands for. Take, for instance, the best and strongest of all his books, *The Husband's Story:* even here the general public has groped rather helplessly to decide just what the author meant. It must be admitted that on the whole the general public has in this particular case been rather stupid in failing to recognize that when Mr. Phillips chose to see this particular story through the eyes of a cer-

tain shrewd and unscrupulous financier, he deprived himself of the chance of expressing his own ideas directly, and was obliged to give us every detail strongly colored by its passage through another man's temperament. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly to some extent Mr. Phillips's own fault that a majority of his readers assumed that *The Husband's Story* was an indictment of the American woman as a whole, and not simply of one limited and ultra-snobbish type of American woman. And the same question of his meaning is raised with considerably more justice in every one of his earlier books. Is *Old Wives for New* a protest against girl-and-boy marriages, or an indorsement of divorce, or both? Is *The Hungry Heart* an arraignment of the *Doll's House* treatment of a wife, or a plea for equal standards for man and woman in questions of morality? And is *The Second Generation* to be taken mainly as a protest against inherited fortunes, a glorification of work, or as a satire upon the snobbery of America's idle class? In other words, had Zola written this book, would his symbol for it have been the Probate Court, the Dinner Pail, or the Powdered Flunkey? It was part and parcel of Mr. Phillips's habitual tendency to see his cross-section of life in its entirety, that he found himself unable to do one thing at a time, found himself obliged to complicate and obscure his central purpose by

having in reality several simultaneous central purposes.

This brings us face to face with the real fault of Mr. Phillips's method of work, the real weakness of even his best achievements. He was not merely the clear-eyed and impartial observer of life; he was always a partisan and a reformer. His interest was so keen in the problems he was seeking to set forth that he found it impossible to keep himself and his ideas out of them. Of course when you take one of Mr. Phillips's novels to pieces you discover that in its essence it is a problem novel; but this side of his work he had learned to disguise pretty cleverly. It is not so much the way in which he twisted the lives of his characters in order to point a moral, as it is the slight running comment going all through the narrative portions of his stories that keeps us reminded both of his personal outlook upon life and of the annoying fact that he is trying to do our thinking for us. Here, for instance, is a trivial little example that may stand as typical of his method: in *White Magic* he had occasion to tell us, as evidence of the expensive scale on which his heroine's mother ran her summer home, that she had no less than five footmen in attendance at the front door. Now, some of us may think this mere foolishness; others may wax indignant over it as a criminal extravagance; and others

again simply regard it as no more than what was proper for a person in her position of life. Mr. Phillips had as good a right as anybody else to his own opinion about it, but it was not good art for him to force that opinion upon the reader by couching this little fact in the following terms: "Five lackeys . . . five strapping fellows with dumb faces and the stalwart figures that the rich select as menial show pieces." There is a veiled sneer in the very intonation of such a sentence that is incompatible with the best art.

It is this uncontrolled tendency to inject the personal equation into his books that every now and then sets the reader tingling with sudden antagonism in the midst of some of his strongest scenes. His outlook upon life was extremely clear-eyed and broad; and if he had been content to give us the uncolored facts and let us think what we would about them, we should get considerably more benefit as well as enjoyment out of contact with his people and their histories. That there is a good deal of snobbery among our wealthy and fashionable class, our imitation aristocracy of money, is undoubtedly true. And to the average sane-minded American there is something distinctly foolish in the sight of an American mother trailing her daughters through Europe with the open and unashamed intention of selling them to a title. But, after all, questions of this kind are

largely a matter of the point of view. There is no useful purpose served in waxing indignant over people who happen to regulate their lives somewhat differently from the way in which you or I would regulate our lives. It is always worth while to set forth as strongly as possible in a story certain existing social conditions which the author in his secret heart condemns, but there is nothing gained by insisting that the reader must condemn them also. It may very well happen that the reader does not at all share the author's views, and in that case such an attempt to prejudice him is fully as irritating as is the coloring given to news in a paper of the opposite political party to your own.

This interference on the part of Mr. Phillips, born as it was of over-earnestness, produced upon the types of his people and the construction of his plots certain modifications which are precisely what a shrewd judge of books might have expected in advance to find there. In the first place, it led him quite frequently to picture, not what average people are doing under existing conditions, but what somewhat unusual people would in his opinion have done under conditions just the reverse of those that exist—as, for instance, in *The Second Generation*, not what happens to the inefficient heirs of great wealth, when the hard-working father dies, but to the distinctly excep-

tional and self-sufficient children of a rich man who, for their own good, deliberately disinherits them. Or again, in *White Magic*, he studied not the typical case of the girl reared in wealth and luxury who, upon losing her heart to an impecunious artist, fights a long battle with herself because she cannot go against her training; but the exceptional case of the girl who flings such training to the winds and brazenly offers her heart and hand to the penniless artist in question, who, being himself equally an exception, repulses her because he selfishly thinks that she will interfere with his art.

And, secondly, this tendency to tell us what we ought to think has its effect upon the individualization of his characters, and more especially upon his women. What I mean here is best illustrated by taking for a moment a book from which this particular fault is absent, *The Husband's Story*. The fact that this book was written in the first person made it of course impossible for Mr. Phillips to obtrude directly his own opinions; and probably it is due to this fact quite as much as to any other that, artistically speaking, this is the best book that he produced. The character of the wife Edna we get entirely as colored by the husband's eyes—as strongly colored as though we were looking at her through a piece of stained glass. The admirable thing about it is that the color is uni-

formly and consistently maintained from start to finish—a bit of craftsmanship that requires a rather masterly touch. In turning from this book to others that are not written in the first person we realize that a good deal of the time Mr. Phillips was coloring his women, not so strongly to be sure, but none the less to a noticeable extent—in other words, that he was forcing us to see them through the medium of his own eyes instead of directly from life. We become aware of this by finding that he quite frequently expects us, indeed demands of us, to admire things that his heroines do and say which we ourselves cannot find at all admirable; and sometimes he is led into making them take certain actions that we are quite sure the women that we ourselves think they are would not have been guilty of taking. But questions of this kind are not a matter for generalization; they can be better understood when we proceed to take up for separate analysis a few of the more significant of Mr. Phillips's novels.

During the dozen years that represent the period of his activity as a writer of fiction, Mr. Phillips produced somewhat less than a score of volumes. To analyze these books one by one in the order of their appearance, beginning with *The Great God*, *Success* and *A Woman Ventures* and coming steadily down the list through *Golden Fleece* and *The Cost* and all the rest of them,

would be not only tiresome but futile. It would be simply one of the many ways of making it impossible to see the woods because of the trees. Mr. Phillips was striving from the start to do pretty much the same sort of thing in all his work; and the only practical difference between his later volumes and his earlier is that he was steadily learning to do the same sort of thing considerably better. For this reason there is no more point in spending time on those earlier volumes than, if one were writing an analysis of Zola, it would be worth while to waste space on *Madeleine Férat* and *Nantas* and *Thérèse Raquin*. In point of fact, one gets quite effectively the whole range of Mr. Phillips's powers and also of his weaknesses in the volumes that belong to his period of mature development, the volumes produced within the last four or five years.

The Second Generation is probably the best book to recommend to a reader approaching Mr. Phillips for the first time, because, on the one hand, it contains less than most of his books that is likely to arouse antagonism; and, on the other, it admirably illustrates his strongest qualities, his ability to give you the sense of life and motion and the clash of many interests. The substance of it can be told in rather fewer words than is usual with Mr. Phillips's novels. Old Hiram Ranger, millionaire manufacturer of barrels in a

small Western town, suddenly makes two rather painful discoveries. First, he learns that his remarkable physical strength, which has never once failed him throughout all his years, is at last breaking and that he has not many days in which to "set his house in order." And his second and even more painful discovery is that for twenty years he has unwittingly been harming his son and his daughter by over-indulgence, allowing them to grow up in idleness, to form foolish and extravagant tastes, to choose their friends exclusively from the ultra-fashionable circles and to learn to despise the humble beginnings from which he himself sprang and from which the money that they thoughtlessly waste has come. He decides in bitter agony of soul that there is at this late date only one thing that he can do to repair his huge mistake: and that is to deprive his children of the inheritance on which they have counted. The act hurts him more cruelly than it can possibly hurt them—it hurts him through his love for them, through his pride in them and through his desire for public esteem and approval, since he foresees that such an act will be misunderstood and disapproved. All of this part of the story, the old man's sturdy courage and shrewd common sense, contrasted with the weak vanity and costly luxury of the son and daughter, is given with graphic truth, rugged strength, and a sure swiftness of

movement. But from the middle point of the story we get a rather exasperating impression that we are being allowed to behold not so much a cross-section of life as an up-to-date morality play. Old Hiram Ranger has chosen rather drastic methods to teach his son and daughter a lesson, to reform their characters, practically to make them over. No one can say that a situation thus created is without interest; but it becomes exasperating to find that the old man has made his calculations with the sureness of omnipotence, that his plan succeeds even in all its minor details and that the son and daughter repent of all their errors, reform themselves completely, are to all intents and purposes born anew. Mr. Phillips was probably not conscious of it when he wrote the book, but none the less it is to all practical intents a grown-up version of the story of the bad little boy who went fishing on Sunday and was drowned and the good little boy who went to church and was rewarded with plum pudding.

A dozen different readers would probably give a dozen different statements of the central theme of *Old Wives for New*. The real importance of this book—for among Mr. Phillips's books it is unquestionably one of the important ones—is that it sets forth quite pitilessly the gradual estrangement that arises between a husband and wife in the course of long years through the woman's sloth

and selfishness and gratification of all her whims. It is an open question whether Mr. Phillips's method of presenting this problem might not have been improved upon. What he has done is to show us first in a brief prelude the sudden ardor of a boy-and-girl attachment, each caught by the mere physical charm of youth and health and high spirits and rushing into a marriage with no firm basis of mutual understanding. Then he skips an interval of about twenty years and takes us into the intimate life of this same couple, showing us with a frankness of speech and of thought that is almost cruel in its unsparing realism the physical and mental degeneration of the woman, fat and old and slovenly before her time, and the unspoken repulsion felt by the man who has kept himself young, alert and thoroughly modern in outward appearance as well as in spirit. The situation is complicated by the presence of two grown children, a son and a daughter, who see unwillingly the approaching crisis and realize their helplessness to ward it off. Such a situation in real life may solve itself in any one of fifty different ways. What Mr. Phillips has chosen to do is to bring the husband in contact with a young woman who represents everything in which his own wife is lacking. And although the man fights for a long time against temptation, in the end he obtains freedom from the old wife through the divorce

court, and promptly replaces her with the new. There is probably no other American novel that gives us with such direct and unflinching clairvoyance the sordid, repellent, intimate little details of a mistaken marriage that slowly but surely culminates in a sort of physical nausea and an inevitable separation. What a good many of us are apt to resent in the book is the stamp of approval that the author seems to place upon the man who deliberately discards a wife after her youth and beauty are gone, not because he thinks it for their mutual welfare, but for the cold-blooded reason that he wants to marry somebody else. There is a sort of heartless immorality about the whole proceeding that makes us feel that the slovenly, faded wife, with her shallow pretense of having worn herself out with household cares, her gluttony that has been the ruin of health and beauty, her peevish temper and ridiculous vanity, makes on the whole a rather better showing than the husband. One cannot leave this book without adding just a word of protest against what may seem a trivial detail, yet is the sort of detail in which Mr. Phillips's technique sins rather frequently. The husband has met the woman who embodies his ideal of feminine perfection quite by chance in the woods, where he and his son are camping out. In the course of three weeks, almost without their knowing it, they have fallen in love with each

other; then comes the awakening, and they go their separate ways, the man still knowing nothing of the woman's identity, of her station in life or of the particular corner of America which is her home. Several chapters later the man is in New York helping his daughter buy her trousseau. There are a thousand shops in New York from which she might choose, but purely by chance she takes her father to the one shop which happens to be presided over by the woman with whom he is in love. A coincidence of this sort is bad enough when it seems to be more or less of a structural necessity; but when, as in this case, one can think of a dozen simple ways of avoidance, it becomes unpardonable.

There is only one excuse for pausing to speak of Mr. Phillips's next volume, *The Fashionable Adventures of Joshua Craig*, namely, that it shows that even yet the author was weak in the power of self-criticism. How it was possible for a writer possessing the breadth of view and the power of expression that have gone into the making of at least four or five of Mr. Phillips's best novels to put forth seriously a piece of cheap caricature like *Joshua Craig* quite passes the understanding of the ordinary impartial outsider. Joshua Craig is simply an exaggerated specimen of a rather exasperating type of novel which has unfortunately become far too common in American fic-

tion: the novel which shows the refined and carefully nurtured American girl, usually from the East, belying all her inherited instincts and acquired training by marrying the rugged, virile, usually rather vulgar man of the people who, for the purposes of this type of novel, is generally represented as coming from the West. The whole type seems to have originated at about the time that Owen Wister made Mollie's New England conscience capitulate to *The Virginian;* and the type has steadily degenerated year by year. But of course it is never fair to quarrel with an author simply because one does not happen to like what he has tried to do. The trouble with *Joshua Craig* is that he has so obviously failed to do what he tried. Joshua is not merely bluff and rugged and primitive of manner; he is loud-mouthed and vulgar and deliberately discourteous. Margaret Severance, the reigning beauty of Washington, whom he decides in his stormy, violent, irresistible way to marry—not because he loves her, but because he conceives the idea that she loves him—is in point of manners pretty nearly his match. She has a way of looking at people " with a lady's insolent tranquillity "; and on one occasion, when she receives a letter that angers her, and her maid happens at the same moment to be buttoning her shoes, she relieves her feelings by springing up and bringing her sharp French heel down with

full force on the back of her maid's hand, leaving it skinned and bleeding. She is distinctly an unpleasant personality, yet even so, to marry her to such a cyclonic boor as Joshua Craig does seem rather like making the punishment exceed the crime.

Passing over *White Magic*, which is simply an innocuous little love story told with rather more explosive violence than the theme warrants, we come to the two books that exhibit Mr. Phillips's ripest powers, *The Hungry Heart* and *The Husband's Story*. *The Hungry Heart* is a sincere and detailed study of a marriage that threatens to be a failure because the man adheres to old-fashioned standards regarding women, while the wife, with her modern education and progressive views, finds it impossible to accept the rôle of domesticity and inaction to which he would assign her. As a piece of careful construction this volume deserves frank praise. The entire action takes place within the house and grounds of the husband's ancestral home; the cast of characters is limited to just four people—two men and two women; we hardly get even a passing glimpse of any outsiders, friends or relatives, or even servants. And yet within this little world of four people we get a sense of universality of theme and interest, an impression not of learning the secrets of a few isolated lives, but of learning much that

is big and vital about man and woman. There is nothing essentially new in the specific story; it is simply one of the many variants of the familiar triangle—the husband and wife who drift apart, the other man who takes advantage of a woman's loneliness to persuade her that she is in love when really she is only bored; and finally the inevitable discovery by the husband of his wife's infidelity. What gives the book its value is not the episode of the wife's frailty, but the wise, far-sighted understanding of the way in which two people, physically, mentally and morally well equipped to make each other happy, gradually drift apart through stubborn adherence to foolish prejudices, mistaken reticence, petty misunderstandings, and a hundred and one trivialities, no one of which by itself is worth a second thought, while the cumulative effect of them all becomes fatal. Mr. Phillips's solution of the story, in which he makes the wife experience a revulsion of feeling that drives her from her lover back to her husband, while the husband, after hearing her confession, not only forgives her but practically admits that he is glad everything has happened as it has, because the effect upon him is to have reawakened his love—this solution comes as a disappointment. One feels it to be in the nature of an anti-climax to an exceptionally fine piece of work. That a man of this husband's conventional, conservative

type could bring himself to pardon and receive back the woman who admits her guilt with a frankness of speech that makes one wince, rings false. Forgiveness under such circumstances is a delusion and a blunder. The ghost of such a past would simply refuse to be laid.

An interesting side light on the concluding chapters of *The Hungry Heart*, which in point of fact came near to being the author's favorite among all his books, is shed by the following anecdote: it was pointed out to him one day in friendly criticism that a woman such as the heroine was portrayed to be throughout the first half of the story would neither have remained with her lover nor gone back to her husband, but would have lived alone unless some third man eventually came into her life. This comment impressed Mr. Phillips to an extent which seemed disproportionate, until he confessed that the solution of a third man was precisely what he had planned from the start as definitely as it lay in him to plan anything in advance. But, he explained, when he had reached the midway point, his characters took the matter quite out of his hands. He suddenly awoke to a realization that his heroine was quite a different woman from what he had all along supposed her to be; she made it clear to him that she was not the kind either to hold to the old lover or to take a new one; she was the type of woman who would

have the courage to go back. "If I have not made her convincing," he concluded, "to that extent *The Hungry Heart* is a failure—but," he added undauntedly, "I know the type of woman I was after and I know she would have done just what I made this woman do."

Lastly, we have *The Husband's Story*, which is the type of book that we had long had the right to expect from Mr. Phillips, and which if he had been spared might have been the first of a long series of equal strength and bigness. Like all of this author's best previous work, it is a study of a marriage that failed. And the reason that it is a better and bigger book than any of his others is not because of his theme, but because of his workmanship: the thing is better done, in its underlying structure, in its working out of details, in all that goes to make up good technique. Robert Herrick, when he wrote *The Diary of an American Citizen*, attempted to handle much the same subject in the same way—but that book, clever though it was, hardly did more than scratch the surface of the opportunity lurking in his theme. Mr. Phillips dug deeper: he has shown us, in the lives of a certain couple, Godfrey Loring and Edna, his wife, all the artificiality and selfishness, the empty ambitions and false ideals that lie behind the tinsel and glitter of the so-called "Four Hundred." The husband tells the story

with great simplicity and directness. He makes no secret of the utter sordidness of their origin in Passaic, New Jersey; of Edna's father, the undertaker, known as Old Weeping Willy; and his own father, "honest innocent soul, with a taste for talking what he thought was politics." He makes it clear that Edna married him, not for love, but because he was getting the biggest salary of any of the young fellows whom she knew and so offered her the best chance of advancement. She deliberately intended, when she married him, to get as much out of him as could be gotten by clever driving; nor could she have planned the thing more ruthlessly had she been acquiring a beast of burden, instead of a husband. Now, the one thing that saves the story and renders it at all possible is the fact that the husband is an exceptional man with that extra sense which constitutes the business instinct, and coupled with it a saving sense of humor. The early chapters, picturing the transition period while Edna was floundering out of the half-baked standards of Passaic into the midway stage of Brooklyn, are full of those wonderful little flashes of first-hand observation that seem like fragments filched, if not directly out of your life and mine, at least from that of the family next door or of the neighbor across the street. This husband is never for an instant under any illusion about his wife; he

realizes her incompetence—the incompetence of thousands of young American wives for the particular work they have undertaken: the work of wife and of mother and of housekeeper. He realizes too her craving for social advancement; and, in a half-confessed way, he sympathizes with her and is willing to accept the fruits of her social conquests, although he will not raise a finger toward helping her. This perhaps is the cleverest touch in Mr. Phillips's satire. He does not tell us in so many words that the husband is just as much at fault as the wife, just as unfitted for his task of husband, and father and master of the house as she is for her duties,—but he makes this perfectly clear and distributes the blame with an admirable equity. If she has been cold and calculating and dishonest in her social life, he has been cold and calculating and dishonest in his business life; if she is meanly and snobbishly ashamed of the people from whom she sprang, so also is he; if she has been too absorbed in her schemes for advancement to give him the companionship due from a wife, he in turn is too absorbed in huge financial deals to give her the love and care due from a husband. In other words, this book might be defined as an indictment of the "high life" American marriage, on the ground of the woman's vaulting ambition and overweening self-importance, and the man's inertia, coupled

with his absorption in the busy game of chasing dollars. A large part of the merit of this undeniably big novel lies in what it merely implies rather than in what it says. To conceive a story of this sort is something in itself to be proud of; but to conceive of telling it through the husband's lips was a stroke of genius. To have told it in any other way would have been to rob it of its greatest merit, the all-pervading sting of its satire.

As I have tried frankly to recognize, Mr. Phillips was a writer with many qualities and some defects—like all men who have it in them to do big things. But it would have been easy to forgive more serious faults than his in any one possessing his breadth and depth of interest in the serious problems of American life and his outspoken fearlessness in handling them. There are, unfortunately, few in this country to-day who are even trying to do the sort of work that he was doing. And the fact that he did it with apparent ease and that he had reached a point where he had begun to do it with triumphant strength multiplies tenfold the tragedy of his untimely death. The interruption of fate at the midpoint in his career has entailed a loss to American fiction not only irreparable but one which can never be accurately measured.

ROBERT HERRICK

It was in the autumn of 1897 that Professor Robert Herrick, who occupies the chair of Rhetoric in the University of Chicago, produced a novel entitled *The Gospel of Freedom*. His name at that time was not quite unknown in fiction, thanks to a few earlier efforts, more notable for manner than for content; yet *The Gospel of Freedom* came quite unheralded, a glad surprise to the serious student of fiction, who at that period was forced to take a rather pessimistic view of the future of the American novel. One did not need to read a dozen pages before discovering that here was a man who was familiar with the best of what the modern French school has to offer; who understood wherein lay the strength of Maupassant, of Bourget, of Zola,—and in a tentative and by no means inadequate way, was trying to profit by their teaching. Its theme was one already familiar to readers of Continental literature: the revolt of the modern, neurotic women against the trammels of social conventions, the awakening of the unhappily mated wife to a sense of her inborn right to live her own life in her own way. In

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other words, it was a variation of the underlying *motif* of *Magda*, of *Hedda Gabler*, of *The Doll's House;* executed with a nice appreciation of European craftsmanship and an equally subtle insight into peculiarly American conditions. Altogether, it was a book of big promise, in spite of considerable unevenness, and here and there a touch that was almost crude; at the time it looked bigger, no doubt, than it does to-day, as we glance back at it, along the vista of his later achievements. One realizes now that he had not yet found himself, that he was working a trifle uncertainly, with tools not quite adapted to his needs, experiencing the dilemma of a foreign-trained machinist attempting to put together American-made implements with nuts and screws cut to a scale of centimeters instead of inches. What he had not yet learned to do and what he soon realized that he must learn before success could come was to adapt Continental methods to Anglo-Saxon needs, to revise his craftsmanship with the same independent courage with which from the beginning he had chosen his themes.

It was during this transition period, this process of finding himself, of discovering just what he was trying to do and how he was trying to do it, that the two books of least interest as stories and of least worth in point of technique were written: *The Web of Life* and *The Real World.*

One feels in reading them over again to-day that the two titles in some degree symbolize the mental attitude of their author at that time. Like his heroes, Mr. Herrick was finding the threads of life's web in a rather sorry tangle, and was groping for a solution of the world's real meaning; and so, inevitably, they forced the reader to do some little groping on his own account. In short, like many another author's second and third book, they were disappointing; and people who had based their faith upon *The Gospel of Freedom* were justified in asking, Is Mr. Herrick destined to remain in the rank of writers of a single book? But the appearance, in due course of time, of *The Common Lot* and its still more virile successor, *The Memoirs of an American Citizen*, answered this question with a vigorous and welcome negative, and foreshadowed the coming of the volume which remains to this day not only Mr. Herrick's biggest achievement but the finest, boldest, most representative piece of American fiction that has appeared within the past decade: *Together*. And this statement is made not merely with Mr. Herrick's subsequent volume, *A Life for a Life*, clearly in mind, but largely for the purpose of discriminating sharply against it. *A Life for a Life* represents, as we shall presently see, a curious and, it is to be hoped, a transient apostasy. Something still remains in it of the old Herrick; certain

pages, here and there, of a purely pictorial character flash forth, with a graphicness that is almost cruel in its unsparing truth, the swarming, turgid city life of to-day. None the less, when the sum total of its plus and minus values has been honestly taken, *A Life for a Life* must be set down upon the debit side of its author's literary account; in other words, it is a rather audacious, rather splendid failure.

But before considering this new phase of Mr. Herrick's development, it is essential to run over quite briefly his earlier novels and thus obtain a bird's-eye view of what in each case he has tried to do and how far he has succeeded in doing it. The first thing of which you become aware in taking up *The Gospel of Freedom* is the initial debt which its author owed to Ibsen and Sudermann and to that whole tendency in drama and fiction that took its impulse from *Heimath* and *Hedda Gabler*. In other words, its theme is in the main the spirit of revolt of the modern restless, somewhat neurotic woman against the established conventions, and the tragedy which such a revolt entails, because the woman fails to understand that freedom is something that must start from within and not from without; something that cannot be acquired by a mere payment of money or a flagrant breaking of the marriage bond. Adela Anthon is too healthy minded a young

woman to be classed with the Magdas and Heddas of the Old World; but she has to a large extent a strain of what, for lack of a preciser term, is wont to be stigmatized artistic temperament. She does not quite despise the brick industry on which the colossal fortune of the Anthons has been reared, nor the comfortable blocks of brick stock which form her independent means; but she does rebel against the prescribed routine of her conventional social life, forces her family to allow her the semi-liberty of a course in the Paris art schools, and at the opening of the book seems in a fair way to marry Simeon Erard, a penniless dabbler in art, a parasite on her uncle's bounty, who has shown much promise in a dozen different lines and accomplishment in none. But before she makes up her mind to bestow her hand and fortune on Erard, in fact before Erard has made up his mind to ask her, a restless, energetic, successful young Westerner, John Wilbur, who is spending a hard-earned vacation in Paris, takes her by storm, dazzles her with the picturesque account of his big achievements in irrigation machinery, and more particularly his conquest over men and over natural forces. Marriage with him would mean a splendid partnership, a new, undreamed-of freedom, an opportunity to have a share in the world's big enterprises. The awakening comes quickly; marriage, she learns with a

shock, is not a partnership; it has its obligations, against which she rebels mutely; but of compensations, in the shape of an understanding and interest in her husband's vast business schemes, she finds there is nothing for her. Within a year after marriage she is declaring bitterly, "There is no freedom for women; they are marked incapable from their birth and are supported by men for some obvious and necessary services. Between times they have a few indifferent joys dealt out to them." But what brings about the final wreck of her marriage is not merely temperamental incompatibility, but a difference in standards of honor and business integrity. Wilbur's business conscience is elastic; if he does not actually have a hand in bribing the legislature to pass certain railroad measures that send stocks and bonds soaring upward, he does participate in the profits; and what Adela finds impossible to forgive is that the very house she lives in is paid for with what she persists in regarding as stolen money. Then follow the death of her only child; the arrival in Chicago of Simeon Erard and his somewhat too pronounced friendship with Adela; her husband's rather vulgar jealousy of the artist; and finally, Adela's open revolt, her refusal to live any longer in a marriage that she feels is only a bondage, and her departure to Paris for an indefinite period. Reckless of conventions, she openly flaunts her

friendship with Erard—a friendship which in her defiant mood she is willing to let drift to any length. But Erard, coldly working for his own best interest, bides his time until the news comes that her husband, through the courts, has given the wife her freedom. In this, however, he overreaches himself; this subservience to the world's opinion on the part of the man who had taught her to despise conventions, and to whom until now she would willingly have given herself, brands him in her eyes a hypocrite, with whom life would be simply another and ignobler form of bondage. She realizes at last that in her rebellion she has not been attaining freedom, but simply beating herself impotently against the bars of a prison largely of her own making.

It has seemed worth while to examine *The Gospel of Freedom* at some length, because in it we find already well developed the two themes that in one form or another underlie all Mr. Herrick's subsequent work—the discords of sex and the discords of commercialism. Adela Wilbur's repudiation of her marriage duties, John Wilbur's repudiation of the highest standards of business integrity, are only the first instances in a long series of lives that Mr. Herrick shows us, wrecking themselves on the same dangerous shoals. *The Web of Life* and *The Real World*, his next two books in point of time, need only a brief mention,

because they are rather loose in structure and of no great significance in the history of his development. *The Web of Life* may be conveniently defined as a male *Gospel of Freedom*, a man's rebellion against the obligations which the world's conventions thrust upon him, just as Adela Wilbur rebelled against the obligations that life laid upon her. Howard Sommers is a promising young physician, whose good fortune it is to find on landing in Chicago that some old friends of the family, the influential and wealthy Hitchcocks, are disposed to help him; that the daughter, Louise Hitchcock, looks upon him with favor; that a place is open for him on the staff of the famous Dr. Lindsay—in short, that he is on the high-road to fortune. But his professional conscience will not leave him in peace; his impractical ideals teach him that it is wrong for a physician to accept payment beyond a mere pittance; his intolerance of the conventions of a fashionable practice makes his early expulsion from Dr. Lindsay's office a foregone conclusion; and the long, disheartening, hand-to-mouth struggle that follows, with all its inherent miseries, and the incidental loss of the woman he loves, is needful to bring him to a sane understanding of the necessity of accepting the world as it is and effecting an honorable compromise between reality and our ideals.

The Real World, while it is an attempt to develop still further this same idea, is mainly interesting as a study of individual lives. The gradual building up of Jack Pemberton's character, from his early boyhood, isolated on a small farm on the Maine coast, until he finally achieves success, prosperity and happiness, is undoubtedly a fine and strong piece of portraiture, executed with a more assured touch than Mr. Herrick had previously achieved. The high purposes which take permanent hold upon the lad at the prompting of a girl seemingly forever beyond his reach, and which continue to force him onward and upward, step by step, even when the girl herself has disappointed his ideals and would have dragged him down with her, are all interpreted with such sympathetic understanding that the secrets of a human soul are laid bare before us, and we understand minutely and intimately how Jack Pemberton succeeded in his endeavor to "keep faith with life."

But Mr. Herrick's strength lies, not in the probing analysis of individual lives, but in the broad, comprehensive interpretation of human motives and tendencies in the mass; and this gift of generalization, this rare ability to treat life on an epic scale, with a bold sweep of brush strokes, an imposing breadth of canvas, has developed and progressed steadily with each successive volume,

up to the full ripeness of *Together*. The first of his stories, however, that showed clearly wherein his real strength lay was *The Common Lot*. Like all stories of the bigger type, it has a twofold motive: first, a specific story of the struggle of a young architect between his artistic ideals on the one hand and business success on the other; secondly, the big, general, far-reaching problem whether the common lot, the comparative obscurity and narrowness of the vast majority of lives, is not better and happier than wealth and position attained at the cost of self-esteem. Francis Jackson begins with splendid ambitions; and had the millionaire uncle who gave him his training at the Paris Beaux Arts also made him his heir instead of leaving the bulk of his fortune to found an industrial school, the nephew might never have felt the temptation to be untrue to his art or to compromise with his conscience. But, under the goad of vanity and ambition and a feverish desire for wealth, he yields to the tempting offers of a dishonest contractor, consents little by little to turn out inferior work, to permit shameless tampering with specifications, to connive at the bribery of building inspectors—in short, to lend himself to every crooked trick known to the profession. And one fine day retribution overtakes him. He is disgraced in the eyes of his friends and relatives, because they discover

that the industrial school erected under his direction, with his uncle's money, is a fraudulent piece of work from cellar to roof. This, however, can be and is hushed up. But another and worse disaster follows, the destruction by fire of a so-called fire-proof hotel, which with his full knowledge the contractor has so skimped and slighted that it is little more than a cardboard death-trap:—and even if the scandal could be silenced, Jackson could never silence the memory of the victims' screams as they flung themselves from the windows or fell inward to a still worse fate. The experience leaves Francis Jackson a sadder but far wiser architect; and although he lives down the scandal, he has learned his lesson well—that it is better to share the common lot and be at peace with one's self than at the cost of self-respect to attain wealth and power and the envious admiration of the world. Because "there are few things that make any great difference to real men and women —and one of the least is the casual judgment of their fellow-men."

The Memoirs of an American Citizen, which might with equal aptitude have been called *The Confessions of a Chicago Packer,* treats more specifically, and from the opposite point of view, the whole big problem of honest and dishonest business methods. Edward Harrington comes to Chicago, a friendless lad, without money or prospects;

he begins as driver for a retail market, and from this he works himself up, step by step, by clever tricks, unscrupulous moves, dishonest deals and combinations, until he ends as controlling power of the Meat Trust, master of the destinies of many railways, banks and trust companies, and United States senator from Illinois. There is not a step in his upward path that by the higher standards of honesty is quite beyond reproach, not an achievement that is not somewhere besmirched. Yet, as he unfolds this very frank and ingenuous chronicle, you feel that the man is honest in his frankness; that he believes himself to be in the right, and justifies to himself each and every questionable act. He believes that it is best for the world that he shall succeed, and in order to succeed he must fight the world with its own weapons. And at the end he looks out over the city of Chicago, with its drifting smoke, its ceaseless traffic:

I, too, was a part of this. The thought of my brain, the labor of my body, the will within me, had gone to the making of this world. There were my plants, my car line, my railroads, my elevators, my lands—all good tools in the infinite work of this world. Conceived for good or for ill, brought into being by fraud or daring—what man could judge *their* worth? There they were, a part of God's great world. They were done; and mine was the hand.

Let another, more perfect, turn them to a larger use; nevertheless, on my labor, on me, he must build.

Involuntarily my eyes rose from the ground and looked straight before me, to the vista of time. Surely there was another scale, a grander one, and by this I should not be found wholly wanting!

There, in a paragraph, we get the colossal, egotistical, invincible confidence of the successful magnate in the justice of his cause. And yet, had he stopped here, Mr. Herrick's picture would have remained unfinished and not quite convincing. But, with unerring instinct, he has added here and there the needful little ironic touch; this masterful man, so sure of himself, so infallible, so far beyond the reach of malice or envy, knows that there are just two or three people in the world whose approbation he craves and cannot win—the old judge who once befriended him, and now does not see him when they pass; the trusted employee who will no longer serve him; his brother's wife, who in early days might have been his own, had he chosen to speak, and who now would starve, and see her family starve with her, rather than take a penny of his money. It is the knowledge of these facts that rankles and adds a dash of bitterness to his final triumph.

To sum up this brief review of Mr. Herrick's past achievements, the general impression that they make upon the critical mind is that, grant-

ing their strength, their subtle understanding of life, their admirable lights and shades, their frequent splendid brilliancy of description, they after all suggest not so much an accomplishment as an apprenticeship to something bigger and higher. To be sure, they are American, unmistakably so; the product of keen interest and intimate understanding of the conditions of life in this country, and more specifically of life in the big, progressive Middle West. And considered as individual volumes, stories of separate human lives, little groups of humanity working out their individual destinies, they deserve to stand high in the list of the best fiction our writers have produced in the last decade. But from the first volume to the last, we cannot escape the impression that Mr. Herrick's dominant interest is in something beyond the mere story he has to tell; that his ideal of fiction is to present through the medium of individual men and women the big, basic problems on which depend the welfare of a people, and, what is more, so to present them as to force the reader, whether he will or not, to take thought of them. Hitherto, however, he has not been ready to accomplish on a big scale the sort of novel of which he has so evidently dreamed—the novel of wide, sweeping, Zolaesque magnitude, with its symbolic title, its crowded canvas, its motley panorama of human lives. Central ideas he has had,

to be sure, and his titles as well as his themes have not been lacking in symbolism; but there was a certain vagueness about them, a lack of specific intent. One might, without serious injustice, shuffle his titles and redistribute them; in a general way, the central characters in all these books are struggling in the Web of Life, learning their lesson of disillusion from the Real World, rebelling against the Common Lot and thirsting for the Gospel of Freedom. It is curious to see how with each successive book Mr. Herrick has broadened his field of vision, as his knowledge of life has widened; how he began as a psychologue of the school of Bourget and Henry James, and little by little swung around to the freer, more objective methods of the realist, caring less and less for the vivisection of a human heart under a microscope and more and more for tracing the orbit of an ethical problem through a telescope. Sooner or later, those who had faith in him felt sure that Mr. Herrick would produce a really big book, perhaps the first of a series of big books; and suddenly, and rather sooner than was expected, he justified this belief with *Together*, his fine, sane, fearless study of American Marriage.

It may be said with some assurance that no American novel of such ambitious purpose and such a sweeping amplitude of outlook has been

written since Frank Norris gave us the opening volumes of his *Epic of the Wheat;* and no such relentless probing into the subtle characteristics of American womanhood since Robert Grant precipitated a war of critics over *Unleavened Bread.* And there is this important distinction to be made in favor of Mr. Herrick's book: that whereas Robert Grant gave us in Selma White just one memorable type, the author of *Together* has given us a score of types, every one of them undeniably, surprisingly, triumphantly true and essentially American. As we have already seen, throughout the wide diversity of his themes, one of Mr. Herrick's persistent preoccupations is the tragedy of mismated marriage. Sometimes, as in *The Gospel of Freedom,* the woman simply mistook for love her unbounded enthusiasm for the man's fighting strength, his virile power to achieve success; sometimes, as in *The Real World,* she makes the more sordid and less pardonable blunder of thinking that wealth and social prestige will compensate her for the absence of love; sometimes, as in *The Common Lot,* she loves not the actual man whom she has married but a figment of her imagination, an ideal that she has created in his image; and when one day he stands revealed and she sees him as he is, the whole universe crumbles miserably to pieces around her. In comparison, however, with *Together,* all these earlier themes take on the aspect

of preparatory studies, trials of strength, as it were, preparing the way to his first big unqualified achievement.

There is no useful purpose to be served by attempting to analyze the central story of *Together*. Like *L'Argent* or *L'Assommoir*, it has no central plot in the usual conventional sense; but just as Zola's novels are the embodiment of some big, symbolic idea, frenzied finance personified by the Bourse, intemperance by the Wine-Shop, earth's universal motherhood by the Soil,—so Robert Herrick has for his central figure the personification of Marriage. The married life of Isabelle Price and John Long, with whose wedding the volume opens, leaving them "henceforth man and wife before the law, before their kind—one and one, and yet not two," is obviously not intended by the author to be more typical or more significant than the score of other marriages of which he unveils for us the intimate joys and griefs. Every well-composed canvas must have its central group, its focal point towards which its significant lines converge: but in *Together* we must bear in mind that it is not Isabelle Price who is the real protagonist, but Marriage with a capital M, the symbolic figure of American wifehood. Graphic as the picture is of this particular couple's first mistakes, their temporary and makeshift readjustment, and their slow, reluctant awakening to actu-

alities, this special side of the book, considered as an individual human story, is only a fragment, an unfinished pattern, a single thread in the intricate and complex fabric of human lives that the author has patiently and splendidly woven. It is not the individual nature of Isabelle Price that we remember as we call to mind those bold opening chapters which are probably the most thought-compelling portrayal of a young couple crossing the threshold of married life that any author has given since Maupassant wrote his unforgettable pages in *Une Vie;* she stands for us simply as the average type of young American womanhood, entering blithely, unthinkingly, unwarned, upon the most serious obligations of life; more engrossed in the guests, the presents, the fit of her wedding gown, the brilliant social function of which for the moment she is the center, than she is in the years of intimate companionship that lie before her. And then, after all has been done, "as ordained by the church, according to the rules of society," and it remains "for Man and Wife to make of it what they would—or could," the inevitable awakening comes and they look into each other's eyes, as countless thousands of wedded couples have done before them, and realize that they are looking into the eyes of strangers. It is not on this particular couple that our gaze should be focused as we read, but on those count-

less couples that preceded them and the countless other couples that are fated to follow. The crucial point is not the mere fact that this particular marriage was a mistake, but that it was "one of the millions of mistakes women make out of the girlish guess," mistakes arising from "blind ignorance of self and life." In short, the recurrent burden of Robert Herrick's theme is the hidden, insistent, inevitable tragedy underlying countless married lives,—the tragedy so often summed up carelessly, even scornfully, with the flippant euphemism of "incompatibility." A plunge in the dark, a bewildered awakening, a losing fight for readjustment, an inevitable revulsion: such is Mr. Herrick's epitome of thousands of marriages the world over; and while this holds true for the world at large, the conditions, he seems to think, are peculiarly aggravated in America. Our lives here are lived to a great extent at fever heat; the husbands tend more and more to consume their vitality in ceaseless nerve-racking strife for more and ever more wealth and power; and the wives are daily sacrificing to vanity and pleasure, social leadership and Browning Societies more and more of the obsolescent virtue of domesticity.

But it would be a mistake to assume that Mr. Herrick finds no happy marriages in America, or even that he would assert that the happy marriage

is a rare exception. The reproach which has been too frequently made against *Together*,—namely, that by assembling a score or more of ill-mated couples, truant husbands, erring wives, the whole sad gamut of incompatibility, infidelity, and the divorce courts, he has shown a distorted perspective, a false sense of proportion,—really rests on no firmer ground than a similar reproach against *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *L'Assommoir*, and every other big, epic study of ethical problems. Mr. Herrick is here studying unhappy marriages, not happy ones; and with the latter type he has no more concern than the pathologist engaged in a research of malarial germs has with healthy human beings or healthy mosquitoes. And equally mistaken is the effort to find in *Together* a remedy for matrimonial discord. Mr. Herrick simply records a certain number of typical cases; he attempts no solution, he merely gives us the facts and says in effect: "Here is what I find; think this over for yourselves." How to remedy the prevailing lack of common interest between husband and wife; the men engrossed in the great game of amassing wealth, the women equally engrossed in the game of spending it; the decrease in domesticity, in motherhood, in the old-fashioned family affection and loyalty—these are conditions which he depicts without bias and without comment, but with the calm assurance of one

who is certain of his facts and of the high moral worth of his purpose. And for this reason *Together* is a book which, whatever may be its relative value as a contribution to literature, belongs, as regards the spirit in which it is conceived, in the category of Zola's *Fécondité* and Tolstoi's *Kreutzer Sonata.*

It seemed reasonable to assume, after a triumph of such magnitude, that our author's course was definitely laid at least for some years to come; that *Together* was the harbinger of a lengthening series of similar vigorous studies of the crucial problems in our busy, arduous American life of to-day, handled with the same fearless and robust naturalism. For this reason, when *A Life for a Life* was published it could scarcely fail to bring to a good many of its author's sincere well-wishers something of a shock. When readers who had hitherto not been in sympathy with Mr. Herrick's aims and achievements permitted themselves to say somewhat patronizingly that *A Life for a Life* was in a distinctly different vein from any of his previous work and that he seemed at last to be really in earnest, it was only natural that his admirers should approach the book with rather somber misgivings. Here was a writer who for twelve years had produced very nearly an annual volume, every one of which had borne witness that he was not merely in earnest but just about as earnest

as, humanly speaking, it is possible for a writer to be,—earnest, that is, in his determination to handle the big truths of life as frankly and sincerely as lay within his power, and to satisfy his own conscience regarding the substance and the method of his work, unmindful whether the general public liked it or not. He had steeped himself in the theories and practice of the Continental school as opposed to the English and American,—that was the real secret of his fearlessness and his strength. If now, for the first time, he had so altered his method that any reader could make the mistake of attributing to him a newborn earnestness, it could mean only one thing: that he had begun to obtrude his own personal opinions,—that, to some extent at least, he had lost that purely objective attitude which has always been one of his chief assets.

And this was precisely what had happened. *A Life for a Life* is as radical a departure from the substance and the method of *Together* as in Zola's case *Les Quatre Évangiles* were from the substance and method of *Les Rougon-Macquart*. It was small wonder that to many a reader the volume brought keen disappointment; small wonder that a review like the London *Academy* found itself gravely saying:

It is rather baffling when we remember the high standard attained by Mr. Herrick in *Together*,—a

book which seemed to hold clear indications of a masterpiece later on,—to find that in his latest volume he lapses almost into mediocrity.

Yet, on the other hand, there were those who hailed *A Life for a Life* as the author's high-water mark. It contained scarcely anything likely to offend those poor, squeamish souls who shrank from the fine honesty of *Together;* it dealt with what newspapers like to speak of as "live issues"; and the one fault of construction in its closely interwoven plot is that it is too careful, too symmetrical to ring true. What, then, is the matter with the book?

The answer is so simple and so obvious that if you cannot see for yourself there is small use in trying to point it out to you. Mr. Herrick has made that disastrous mistake that many another and bigger novelist has made before him, of becoming more interested in his text than in his story; of losing his clear perception of men and women in his sociological theories about man and woman; of blurring his whole picture, because he tries to paint the universe at once. What he has undertaken to do, so far as one may venture to expound his purpose, is to crowd into the limits of a single canvas the sum-total of those social and economic questions that are to-day responsible for most of our national unrest. It involves

problems as wide apart as the curbing of the trusts, the suppression of anarchy, the justification of trade unions, the regulating of the social evil. It covers a vaster field than even *Uncle Tom's Cabin;* for although that book dealt with a problem nation-wide in interest, it at least narrowed down to a single question with but two possible answers. *A Life for a Life* propounds a score of questions, each with more sides than can readily be counted. In all modern fiction only one other volume comes to mind so all-embracing in its summing-up of existing social conditions: Zola's *Paris*,—and *Paris* does not occupy a high place in the life-work of Émile Zola.

In undertaking to epitomize *A Life for a Life,* one feels something of that awkwardness which is experienced in an attempt to pick up any rather bulky object that seems to protrude an uncomfortable number of points and angles. Here, however, in a brief and somewhat ragged abstract, is the substance of it. Hugh Grant, a foundling, indebted to his foster-father even for the name he bears, leaves his country home, yields to the lure of the city. The author nowhere says that the city in question is New York; but his local color fits no other place on the terrestrial globe. The city's wealth and power are symbolized in the person of Alexander Arnold, banker and multimillionaire, who gives Hugh a chance, for no bet-

ter reason than that Arnold had once known the elder Grant and incidentally cheated him out of a fortune. Hugh finds lodgings almost directly beneath a mammoth electric advertising sign that perpetually flashes the word "SUCCESS" into the eyes of men. Incidentally, he forms a friendship with a man at war with society who is known to the reader by no other name than "the Anarch." Also, he meets a sweat-shop girl, a certain young Jewess named Minna, and witnesses the hideous accident by which she is maimed for life and driven into what Mr. Kipling has called "the oldest profession in the world." These details sound fragmentary; that is the inevitable penalty of overcrowding a pattern. Now Arnold, banker and millionaire, maker and destroyer of men, likes young Grant and proceeds to "try him out," by sending him West and using him as the tool with which to acquire certain vast Western properties, —consolidate, amalgamate, play all the tricks of the big financial game, heedless of the trail of ruin that the process may leave in its wake. Hugh, being what he is, fails to live up to Arnold's expectations. He is too clean-minded, or has breathed too much clean Western air; or, if you please, he is, as Arnold thinks, too big a fool to succeed in the modern business struggle. Then there is still another complicating factor. Like Polonius, Arnold has a daughter; and like Hamlet, young

Grant harps upon her. Like Hamlet also, when the time comes for him to accept the good things of life that are offered to him, he practically tells her "Get thee to a nunnery"—because to win her means acceptance of modern economic conditions and to this he cannot bring himself. Having symbolized all the varied strata of society, all the warring creeds and doctrines of the economic world, Mr. Herrick obviously felt the need of some impressive, spectacular climax, some titanic convulsion of nature which, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, would symbolize the wiping out of the old order of things and the ushering in of a new. This he accomplishes by the simple device of transferring the San Francisco earthquake and fire to New York City. Pictorially, his presentment of the vast upheaval of a metropolis, the clamor of men and the crash of falling buildings, the writhings of massed humanity in their death throes, leaves nothing to be desired. But what one does resent is that nice subservience of chance which obligingly lets all the characters in the book meet one another at the psychic moment in the midst of chaos. Hugh, shaken from bed in the cosmic crash, casually wanders out through reeling streets, meets Minna, the woman of the gutter, and exchanges with her what Homer would have called "winged words," then moves onward through showers of stone and sheets of

flame and casually rescues from a mob Arnold's daughter, Alexandra. Then follow more winged words, in the course of which the girl rises to the heights of unselfishness that he once had vainly demanded of her and he explains that it is now too late since he is a sick man dying of cancer. Moving onward along more reeling streets, they reach her father's bank, where Alexandra learns that her husband,—I forgot to mention that she had married her father's partner,—lies dead in the safe deposit vault, smothered by the very mechanism provided to protect his wealth. Her father, meanwhile, is speeding eastward in his automobile toward the Brooklyn Bridge, plowing a juggernaut course through frenzied mobs, when, just on the threshold of safety, the Anarch, who turns out to be old Arnold's disowned son, arises out of darkness an avenging nemesis, springs into the machine, swings it around and drives himself and his father back to their fate in the flame-swept city.

As above pointed out, the effect of this synopsis is to leave an irritating sense of detached fragments; and that is precisely the sense one gets from the book itself. It conveys the impression not of a vast, complex, closely reticulated scheme of society, but of a handful of individuals afloat in some sort of an attenuated social medium, who by some strange law of attraction miraculously meet

each other under seemingly impossible circumstances. Picture for a moment the chaos of a mammoth city overwhelmed by earthquake and by fire. A man might go mad at such a time, impotently seeking the loved ones whom he could not find. Mr. Herrick simply lost his sense of reality in the latter part of his book. It is a thing he never did before and one sincerely hopes that he will never do it again. Much symbolism, it would seem, hath made him mad; and furthermore, it is an obscure symbolism that leaves the reader groping.

This, then, to-day, is the position of Robert Herrick. For nearly a score of years he has been true to a definite ideal, writing to please himself, regardless of popular approval. And through pleasing himself he attained at last, in *Together*, that pleasantest of victories, a popular indorsement of his own methods and standards. And then suddenly, inexplicably, he chooses to fling aside the victories attained, abandon a hard-won battlefield and branch off in a new direction to fight on untried ground. It is to be hoped not only for his own sake but for the greater good of American fiction that before it is too late Mr. Herrick will go back again to the firm ground of his acknowledged victories.

EDITH WHARTON

In undertaking a critical estimate of any of our modern novelists there is usually a good deal to be learned from a study of their early work, the volumes that stand as a record of their apprenticeship. In the case of Mrs. Wharton, however, we have to dispense with any such sidelight. When her first collection of short stories appeared in 1899, under the title of *The Greater Inclination*, the most salient fact about them and the one which brought swift recognition was their mature power, their finished art. As it seemed to us then, the clear-cut, polished brilliance of those eight keen studies of human heart-pangs represented the full development of a talent of unusual magnitude. Now, from the vantage point of a dozen years, we can see that the author of *The House of Mirth* and *Madame de Treymes* was still far from having found the full measure of her strength; that a plenitude of culture and social wisdom had veiled an unsure technique; and that a normal sympathy for human weakness was either lacking or else deliberately masked under an assumption of amused irony. It is possible to

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show with a fair degree of conclusiveness that in these respects Mrs. Wharton's later work is bigger and stronger and more human. Yet the changes are of a subtle kind that would not strike the casual reader's naked eye; and for that reason it is more helpful, in considering her general characteristics as a story teller, and before taking up her separate volumes, to ignore any division into periods and to treat of her style, her methods, her philosophy of life as though there were no essential difference between her first book and her last.

Now the first thing that must strike a discriminating critic, whether he makes her acquaintance through the medium of "The Muse's Tragedy" or "The Letters," is that he has to do with an author of rare mental subtlety and unusual breadth of culture; a worldly wise person with wide cosmopolite sympathies, yet rather rigid prejudices of social caste. One would guess, with no further help than the light shed by her own writings, that here was a mind that might be likened to a chamber of art treasures—not overcrowded, but sufficiently rich to offer a pleasing harmony of color and form. Such, at all events, is the impression that one gathers from her stage setting. She lingers over each interior, its portières and wall-papers, its etchings and mezzotints, its choice old furniture and fragile porcelain with

the grudging reluctance of a bibliophile relinquishing a first edition or a priceless binding. So far as the atmosphere of her stories goes, there is everywhere a pervading sense of art and literature and culture; a sense, as it were, of sunlight softly filtering through richly stained glass; of life seen relentlessly within the limits of a definite angle. Mrs. Wharton's literary activity has resulted, up to the present day, in somewhat more than fifty short stories and novelettes, and three novels; and of these the great majority deal frankly with the literary and artistic circle. One has only to run over in memory the separate stories to realize the truth of this. There are, for instance, no less than a dozen in which the hero is by profession an author; every reader recalls at once "The Muse's Tragedy," "Souls Belated," "Full Circle," "Expiation," "The Legend," "The Touchstone," and there is no use in amplifying the list; and next to authors her favorite heroes are artists, as witness "The Portrait," "The Recovery," "The Rembrandt," "The Moving Finger," "The Daunt Diana," "The Letters," "The Verdict," and "The Potboiler." Yes, her angle of outlook upon the world is rather narrow; but, like the proverbial still waters, within that angle her thought runs rather deep.

Yet if Mrs. Wharton shows a predilection for artistic and academic society, she nevertheless has

a far-reaching—I was tempted to say, an exaggerated—instinct for social values. In all the various settings of her stories, whether in the self-satisfied provincialism of a New England college town, or the full flood-tide of New York life today, or of Lombardy a century ago, she never for an instant allows you to lose sight of the fact that there exists a local social code more potent than any laws of Medes and Persians; a fine, stratified caste system, too attenuated for any but the native born to grasp in all its details, yet inflexible in matters of cause and effect. Her subtle sense of the far-reaching significance of some quite trivial, perhaps unconscious infringement of these unwritten rules of conduct, gives us the real key to a number of her strongest situations. Her understanding of human nature, her relentless pursuit of a motive down to its ultimate analysis, her deliberate stripping off of the very last veils of pretense, showing us the sordidness and cowardice of human souls in all their nudity, are unsurpassed by any other woman novelist now living. She has a trick not merely of describing even her secondary characters so clearly that you feel you can see them both inside and out, but she often flings out some single line of description which ever afterwards sticks to that particular character like a burr and is probably the first thing we think of each time that char-

acter reappears. For instance, in "Souls Belated," "Mrs. Tillotson, senior, dreaded ideas as much as a draught in her back"; in "A Coward," "Mrs. Carstyle was one of the women who make refinement vulgar"; in "The Mission of Jane," Mrs. Lethbury is described as a woman "most of whose opinions were heirlooms—she was proud of their age and saw no reason for discarding them while they were still serviceable"; and still again in "The Portrait," Vard, the political boss, is described to us as a man "who had gulped his knowledge standing, as he had snatched his food from lunch-counters; the wonder of it lay in his extraordinary power of assimilation." And such examples could be multiplied indefinitely.

But this is merely a superficial aspect of Mrs. Wharton's treatment of character and of life. And to some extent the surface sparkle of her style is at times a blemish; we find ourselves straying away from the central interest of the story in order to relish for a moment the sheer verbal cleverness of some casual epigram, such as "Genius is of small use to a woman who does not know how to do her hair"; or "To many women such a man would be as unpardonable as to have one's carriage seen at the door of a cheap dressmaker." Her whole attitude toward the personages of her stories is a direct application of La Rochefoucauld's maxim that in the sorrows and

misfortunes of our friends we find something that is not altogether displeasing. And her stories allow her abundant opportunity to do this. From first to last they deal with the victims of fate—men and women who are caught in the meshes of circumstance and struggle with as hopeless impotence as so many fish in a drag-net. Mrs. Wharton may not be conscious of it, but there is a great deal of predestination in the philosophy of her stories. Nearly all her heroes and heroines seem foreordained to failure. Of struggle, in the sense in which drama is defined as a struggle, a conflict of wills, her books contain little or nothing. Her tragedies belong to one or the other of two classes, or to a combination of the two: on the one hand, to the complications arising from not understanding, from the impossibility of ever wholly getting inside another person's mind; and on the other, from the realization that one cannot escape from one's environment, that one's whole family and race have for generations been relentlessly weaving a network of custom and precedent too strong for the individual to break.

As for the first of these tragic keynotes, that of *misunderstanding*, it is only necessary to glance through a few of the separate stories chosen almost at random to see how the word recurs over and over, with or without variations, like a *leitmotiv*. Thus in the story entitled "In Trust,"

Halidon sums up the crucial point with the words, "I can't make her see that I'm differently situated"; in "The Last Asset," Garnett lays his finger on the difficulty, "Ah, you don't know your daughter!" In "The Portrait," Mrs. Mellish says: "I wish you'd explain," and Lillo answers: "Would there be any failures if one could explain them?" In "Souls Belated," Lydia asks piteously: "You do understand, don't you?" and the heroine of "The Muse's Tragedy" says pathetically, "I shall never be quite so lonely again now that some one knows." "That's the dreadful part of it," says Mrs. Westall, in "The Reckoning," "the not understanding." And even in "The Daunt Diana," where the idol of old Humphrey Meave's heart was not a woman but a statue, the same *leitmotiv* recurs in the concluding paragraph, "Now at last we understand each other."

The other tragic motive, that of the inexorable demands of social traditions, the unwritten law of *noblesse oblige*, we find forming the very warp and woof of all Mrs. Wharton's bigger and more serious efforts. In *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart is tossed as helplessly as a cork in the whirls and eddies of the social stream—tossed and buffeted and finally dragged under with her eyes wide open to her own helplessness. In *The Valley of Decision*, Odo Valsecca and Fulvia Vivaldi sacrifice

their happiness to the obligations of rank, a prince's duty to his people; and they do this not in the spirit of generous sacrifice, but rather because they recognize the impossibility of doing anything else. And so again in *Madame de Treymes*, even an American finds that all the vaunted freedom and independence of our republic avails nothing when confronted by the impalpable yet unyielding wall of French family tradition and prejudice.

So much for the general character of Mrs. Wharton's situations and problems. Before turning to take a more specific glance at some of the separate stories, it is well to get the following points clearly in mind regarding her technique of construction. Mrs. Wharton is one of those exceptional writers who do not greatly concern themselves with conventional rules of length and breadth. Economy of means is a principle which never binds her against her will. Her short stories frequently lengthen out into the structure and dimensions of a novelette; her novelettes might so easily have been expanded into full-length novels. She writes apparently to suit herself, in whatever way the narrative comes most naturally to her. A Maupassant with a different ideal of story structure, a more relentless self-discipline, would have used a vigorous pruning knife on almost any of her stories and gained, it might be, sharper ef-

fects, but at the sacrifice of much delightful cleverness and some rare and subtle half-tones. We must accept Mrs. Wharton as she is, recognizing frankly that she is one of those writers who must do the thing their own way if they are to do it at all—but do not let us fall into the widespread error of assuming that because her stories are so remarkably good she necessarily has a flawless technique.

It would be impracticable as well as bewildering to attempt a detailed survey of all or even a majority of Mrs. Wharton's stories. We must necessarily make a slender choice, touching only the higher places. The first volume, however, *The Greater Inclination*, needs closer attention for the purpose of pointing out some structural weaknesses. The opening story, "The Muse's Tragedy," deals with a young critic's interest in an older woman who in earlier years was the source of inspiration to a now deceased poet. Danyers, the critic, has learned to know Mrs. Anerton first as the "Sylvia" of Vincent Rendell's verse; secondly, through the gossip of a quite negligible woman, Mrs. Memorall; thirdly, by direct association with Mrs. Anerton herself, and, lastly, through her voluntary self-revelation when in one sentence she not only destroys Danyer's hopes, but sweeps away the entire legend that had gathered around her: "It is because Vincent Rendell

didn't love me that there is no hope for you." Now the central idea of this story is clear as crystal, the tragedy of an unloved woman as seen through the eyes of another man. Two men and one woman, and a single point of view: that, I think, is the way Mrs. Wharton would have written the story ten years later; she would have done it more in the manner of "The Dilettante," and by doing so have gained in power.

"A Journey," Mrs. Wharton's second story, offers one of the strongest situations she ever used: a woman, bringing her invalid husband home to New York, discovers in the morning, shortly after leaving Buffalo, that he is lying dead in his berth. To avoid being put off the train she all day long keeps up the pretense that he is too ill to be disturbed, and breaks down under the strain only at the moment when the train glides into the Grand Central Station. Now the greatness of a short story very largely depends upon the trick of choosing all details of structure with the idea of making each in turn add its share to the poignancy of the situation. In the present case it seems axiomatic that the ultimate tragedy of the situation would depend upon the degree of affection that the wife felt for the dead man. Mrs. Wharton has chosen to tell us without reserve that the wife had ceased to care for him at all. She is a frail woman, physically unstrung,

a little frightened at her isolation and helplessness; but that ultimate turn of the screw which comes of a great personal bereavement is missing.

And thirdly, we come to that much-praised story, "The Pelican"; the history of a woman, who, finding herself a widow with a small child and no property, undertakes to support herself by lecturing in hotel parlors and before women's clubs. She has a scant mentality, but she makes a moderate success, "thanks to her upper lip, her dimple and her Greek"—thanks also to encyclopædias and an indulgent public that sympathizes with her desire to educate her boy. Thirty years later she is still making the rounds of clubs and parlors for the purpose of raising money to educate the same boy. Now the crucial moment of the story comes when the boy, a bearded man of thirty, runs across her at a hotel, discovers her subterfuge and demands an explanation. All this is natural enough; but the story is told in the first person by an old friend of the mother; the son drags this old friend, a stranger to him, into his mother's presence, and before him denounces her in terms that make one wince. His whole manner is in bad taste—perhaps Mrs. Wharton meant him to be precisely that kind of a man, but one doubts it. At all events, if she were writing that story to-day she would not have made him a man of quite that kind.

In this way we might take up those early stories one by one and show how they miss that finer perfection which Mrs. Wharton began to show in *Crucial Instances*, and which she shows so triumphantly in *The Descent of Man*. It is hard in speaking of this third volume to discriminate in favor of any particular stories—they are all so extremely good. In the one that lends its title to the book we have the delightful irony of the struggle of old Professor Linyard between the hobby of his life on the one hand and the practical needs of daily sustenance on the other. His heart is in "the ethereal reactions of the infusoria and the unconscious cerebrations of the Amœba"; he has contempt for the world at large, and writes what he thinks to be a biting satire on the modern popular thirst for books of pseudo-science. But the public insists on taking his satiric volume, *The Vital Thing*, in earnest and on making a lion of him; and when we take leave of the poor professor he is still planning some time or other to go back to his serious work in life, the Amœba,—but he has just signed a profitable contract for a sequel to *The Vital Thing*.

But unquestionably, if we must discriminate, we should do so in favor of "The Other Two," the story of a woman twice divorced and a third time wedded. When Waythorn married Alice Varick, who had earlier been Alice Haskett and

had brought with her Haskett's little daughter, "he had fancied that a woman can shed her past like a man." But in this he was to learn slowly that he was mistaken. Both of his predecessors are still alive; both of them, by a series of quite natural coincidences, come into contact with himself and Alice, partly through business relations, partly through social exigencies. He rebels at first fiercely, yet impotently; then little by little accepts the inevitable; and the curtain falls at last on the group of all three husbands, past and present, assembled in Waythorn's sitting-room with Alice placidly pouring tea for them. There is not a single brush stroke, a single touch of color in the whole picture that one could afford to alter. It is a little masterpiece of its kind, a deliciously ironical apotheosis of conventionalism.

These examples suffice to show the peculiar and inimitable quality of Mrs. Wharton's gift for the short story, when she is at her best. The later stories differ often in their specific kind, but scarcely any of them show a higher excellence than she had already attained in *The Descent of Man.* It is a temptation to linger over such a delicate piece of artistry as "The Daunt Diana," in which an impecunious art collector, after having long and hopelessly coveted a famous collection of rare antiques, unexpectedly inherits a fortune, buys the collection and then finds himself more unhappy

than before, because the collection is not really his,—it has not been gathered slowly and laboriously, piece by piece; it lacks that ultimate zest known to all true collectors, that of pursuit and conquest. He has no other remedy than to sell the collection at auction, scatter it to the four corners of Europe, make the greater part of it practically inaccessible, and then—begin over again and squander the residue of his fortune in tracking down and buying back each one of the scattered treasures. Then, again, there is "The Letters," a cruel little story of a man's easy-going selfishness and a woman's limitless tolerance. When Vincent Deering is left a widower, it seems to Lizzie West, who for years has been his little daughter's daily teacher and companion, and for months has listened to his protestations of love, that now, after a decent interval, they may marry. Deering is an artist and has made his home in France; but now money complications summon him to America. Lizzie writes to him, at first each day, then once a week, then at longer intervals; but never a line comes back from him. Two years pass; then, one day, she casually runs across him in a restaurant. At heart she is unchanged, but externally she is a different Lizzie from the one he knew and forgot. She has had a small fortune left her by a distant relative; and prosperity has already set its mark upon her. Deering finds an

ingenious and convincing explanation for his long silence,—an explanation that sets him in a noble light of self-sacrifice; and swept along in the full tide of his eloquence, Lizzie forgives him, and surrenders herself and her fortune. It is not until some time after their marriage that she accidentally comes across, in an old trunk, all her former letters to him. There is nothing strange in the mere fact of finding them; it is the further detail that they are unopened, that he never took the trouble to break their seals, that brings enlightenment. In her first passionate resentment, she wants him to know that she has found him out, wants to taunt him with his shallowness and his hypocrisy, and then to leave him. And some such ending would have been the blunder of a lesser talent. Mrs. Wharton was wiser than that; she knew that for the Lizzie Wests of this world, though an idol may be shattered, there remains no resource but to go on worshiping the fragments: "She understood now, . . . he was not the hero of her dreams, but he was the man she loved."

But to speak separately of each short story which for one reason or another stands out conspicuously beyond its neighbors in these several volumes would be to consume a disproportionate space and time upon only one side of Mrs. Wharton's literary activities. She began by proving her easy mastery over the short-story form; the

interesting question remained whether she would be equally dexterous in her management of structure in the full-length novel. For this reason it is worth while to examine at some length her first and most ambitious experiment in that direction, *The Valley of Decision*. She was fortunate at the outset in her choice of a subject peculiarly congenial to her temperament and acquired tastes. Her ambition was to sum up, in a single volume, Italian life as a whole in the latter half of the eighteenth century, that crucial *settecento*, which has aptly been compared to the closing act of a tragedy. It was a period of fallacious calm, following the war of the Austrian Succession, when beneath the surface all Italy was seething with undercurrents of rebellion against the old established order of things; when "the little Italian courts were still dozing in fancied security under the wing of Bourbon and Hapsburg suzerains"; when clergy and nobles still clung tenaciously to their class privileges and united in their efforts to repress the spread of learning; when throngs of the ignorant and superstitious still crowded the highroads to the shrines of popular saints, and a small but growing number of enlightened spirits met in secret conclave to discuss new and forbidden doctrines of philosophy and science. It is a big subject and one full of epic values—a subject which it is easy to imagine

a Balzac or a Tolstoy treating in the bold, sweeping, impressionistic way that it demands. But it was not easy to imagine in advance what an introspective writer such as Mrs. Wharton had hitherto shown herself could make of such a theme. That the resulting volume showed much comparative excellence came as a pleasant surprise. She brought to her task no small amount of erudition; she was saturated to her finger tips with the historical facts of the period: the motley and confusing tangle of petty dukedoms, the warring claims of Austria and of Spain. She gave us not merely a broad canvas but a moving panorama of the life of those restless times, presenting with a certain dramatic power and a clear sense of relative values, the discontent of the masses; the petty intrigues of Church and aristocracy; the gilded uselessness of the typical fine lady with her *cavaliere servente*, her pet monkey and her parrot; the base ignorance of the peasantry; the disorders and license of the Bohemian world, the strolling players and mountebanks—in short, all the various social strata and sub-strata of the period. The book is less a novel than a sort of cultured *Sittengeschichte* of the epoch, comprehensive, thorough and rather ponderous. It is not surprising to find now and again a certain avoidance of the concrete and the specific; that is a defect commonly found in historical fiction of any period.

It is always safer to leave out a detail than to run the risk of putting one in that has not been amply verified. Yet curiously enough *The Valley of Decision* lacks, much of the time, another element which needed no verification: namely, the sunshine, the blue sky, the redolence of warmth and color and surface gaiety which is the very essence of Italy—which makes itself felt in every page of Stendhal's *Chartreuse de Parme;* is woven into the woof and warp of *Romola,* and goes far towards redeeming the tawdry sensationalism of Ouida. There are times when one cannot help suspecting that Mrs. Wharton has something in common with her hero, who, she tells us, "had lived through twelve Italian summers without sense of the sun-steeped quality of an atmosphere that even in shade gives each object a golden salience. He was conscious of it now only as it suggested fingering a missal stiff with gold leaf and edged with a swarming diversity of buds and insects." Her consciousness of nature is, in this volume, of much the same sort; when she pauses to describe it, she usually does so from a purely esthetic point of view, with an artist's professional enjoyment of some grouping of rocks or trees which would make an effective picture, "a scene which Salvator might have painted"; or a bend in the road where "the roadside started into detail like the foreground of some minute Dutch

painter." And these descriptions are always of the briefest character. It is only when she becomes interested in some matter of esthetic or philosophic import that she permits her pen to run freely. It is worth while to quote even at some length a characteristic passage of this latter type, because such passages constitute a formidable proportion of the pages in this particular volume:

In the semi-Parisian capital, where French architects designed the king's pleasure-houses and the nobility imported their boudoir-panelings from Paris and their damask hangings from Lyons, Benedetto Alfieri represented the old classic tradition, the tradition of the "grand manner," which had held its own through all later variations of taste, running parallel with the *barocchismo* of the seventeenth century and the effeminate caprices of the rococo period. He had lived much in Rome, in the company of men like Winckelmann and Maffei, in that society where the revival of classical research was being forwarded by the liberality of princes and cardinals and by the indefatigable zeal of the scholars in their pay. From this center of esthetic reaction Alfieri had returned to the Gallicized Turin, with its preference for the graceful and ingenious rather than for the large, the noble, the restrained; bringing to bear on the taste of his native city the influence of a view raised but perhaps narrowed by close study of the past; the view of a generation of architects in whom archeological curiosity had stifled the artistic instinct, and

who, instead of assimilating the spirit of the past like their great predecessors, were engrossed in a sterile restoration of the letter.

It requires a certain conscious effort to disinter from under all this superimposed erudition the essential central thread of the story. The stage setting is an imaginary petty dukedom, Pianura, in the north of Italy, owing allegiance to Charles Ferdinand on the one hand, and attached by marriage to the house of Hapsburg on the other. The hero, Odo Valsecca, is of the Old Order, heir presumptive to the throne of Pianura, and kept from the succession only by an invalid cousin and the latter's sickly child. In his character and temperament Odo represents the conflicting tendencies of the times. He is in sympathy with the new ideas of progress and liberty, and has brief flashes of energy and enthusiasm. But they soon burn themselves out, for he is fundamentally lethargic and indifferent, inheriting the fatal taint of his house. The heroine, Fulvia Vivaldi, represents the New Order. She is the daughter of a professor of philosophy, who has suffered exile for his temerity in teaching the forbidden learning. Under Fulvia's influence Odo becomes an eager disciple of the new philosophy, and he is on the point of sacrificing his prospects and accompanying her to France, when the death of his cousin

unexpectedly makes him Duke of Pianura. To the man and the girl his duty is plain—this is so typical of Mrs. Wharton!—the idea of rebellion against fate hardly seems to occur to them; he must accept his burden and devote his life to securing for the people of Pianura the liberty to which they are entitled. As for Fulvia, she may either continue on her way alone to Paris, or she may remain at Pianura under conditions which she will not accept:

"The Regent's mistress?" she said slowly. "The key to the treasury, the back-door to preferment, the secret trafficker in titles and appointments? That is what I should stand for—and it is not to such services that you must even appear to owe your power. I will not say that I have my own work to do; for the dearest service I could perform would be to help you in yours. But to do this I must stand aside. To be near you, I must go from you. To love you, I must give you up."

No one can say that this was not excellent reasoning. But three years later Fulvia changes her mind, returns to Pianura, and accepts the very conditions which she previously so emphatically refused. The result is an impression of inconsistency, a feeling that the Fulvia who went away and the Fulvia who came back are two quite different persons. Apparently, however, her return

was a structural necessity, in order to pave the way for an effective and tragic ending. Fulvia spurs Odo on to give the people a liberal constitution for which they are not yet ready, and in the midst of the ensuing riots receives in her heart the shot intended for her lover. Such in brief is the substance of a story which the general tendency of criticism has been to overvalue. The characters are clearly and conscientiously drawn, the drama in which they play their part deals with vital questions of life and liberty and human happiness; yet for the most part they leave us cold; they fail to touch the keynote of responsive sympathy. The explanation lies, of course, in the author's willingness to subordinate the human interest of her story, the individual joys and sorrows of her characters to the exposition of her main theme, the sociological conditions of Eighteenth Century Italy. In other words, at the time of writing *The Valley of Decision* she had not yet learned the trick of that delicate balance between the general and the specific theme, which is the hall-mark of the strongest and biggest type of fiction.

There remain three other volumes which demand specific notice: *The House of Mirth*, *Madame de Treymes* and *The Fruit of the Tree*. Two intermediate volumes, *The Touchstone* and *Sanctuary*, although highly characteristic, are of no

more significance in relation to Mrs. Wharton's growth as an artist than the majority of her short stories, perhaps rather less significant than just a few of them. *The Fruit of the Tree*, although the latest of her long novels, may well be put out of the way first, as representing the greatest gulf between purpose and accomplishment that any of her books afford. The story opens with an accident in a woolen mill by which an employee loses an arm. The affair would be hushed up but for the efforts of John Amherst, assistant foreman, and Justine Brent, hospital nurse, both of whom lose their positions in consequence. The mills are run in the interest of capitalists and in defiance of factory regulations; they are owned by a young widow, Bessie Westmore, who has been content to shirk her responsibility and leave matters in the hands of her trustees. John Amherst marries the widow, believing that he has convinced her of the justice of his plans to reform the mills; and here begins a long, slow struggle and an inevitable estrangement,—since Bessie, contrary to her husband's expectations, cannot see why her money should be thrown away on clubrooms and gymnasiums for the workmen, when she needs new gowns, new carriages, new automobiles. Estrangement begets defiance; and Bessie deliberately risks her life on a horse that Amherst has forbidden her to ride. The result is a disas-

trous fall and serious damage to the spine, near the base of the brain. Her husband cannot reach her for weeks; he is traveling in South America. The doctors know that there is not one chance in a thousand for her recovery; but there is a hope, through the cruel skill of modern surgery, of keeping her alive until Amherst can arrive. But this can be done only at the cost of unimaginable torture, an augmenting anguish that wrings from the sufferer a ceaseless, hoarse, inarticulate cry increasing in intensity with the slow passage of the days. Justine Brent, the trained nurse, who has been a lifelong friend of Bessie, finds her patient's agony more than she can bear to witness, and mercifully cuts it short with an extra hypodermic of morphine. She believes in her conscience that she has done right; and not a doubt assails her until, in the course of years, she herself becomes the wife of John Amherst, and he comes to know that in the eyes of the law she would be regarded as the murderess of his first wife. The plot of this story, in so far as it concerns the right of the medical profession to shorten suffering where a cure is hopeless, is not a new theme. It has been briefly but poignantly handled in a short story by Mrs. Atherton; it has been worked out at great length by Édouard Rod in *La Sacrifiée*. Mrs. Wharton has nothing new to add to this issue; and by bringing in factory reform

and labor questions she has simply obscured her main theme.

The House of Mirth is a book of altogether different caliber, a big, vital, masterly book of its type and one that utterly refuses to be forgotten. Like so many of Mrs. Wharton's earlier and shorter stories, it is a trenchant satire on the manners and customs of certain social strata in New York of to-day. The pages are not overcrowded with figures; yet these are so wisely chosen and so deftly sketched in as to give an impression of many-sided, kaleidoscopic life. The book, however, belongs primarily to the type of the one-character story. It is a history of just one woman, Lily Bart, through a few crucial years. The remaining personages in the story, whether few or many, are mere background, shadow shapes that come and go, with no other effect than to make the central figure stand out in sharper relief. Lily Bart at the opening of the story is, in spite of her nine and twenty years, still essentially a girl, with a girl's unquenchable desire for a continuation of the ease and luxury, pleasure and adulation that have hitherto been her birthright. But her parents are dead; her resources are almost exhausted; and she has all the helplessness which characterizes those brought up in accordance with the sheltered-life system, when confronted with the elemental

problem of self-support. She has in fact only one obvious path open to her, námely, marriage; she may marry for money and despise herself; or she may marry for love and repent at leisure, or else suffer the equally probable pain of seeing her husband do sufficient repenting for them both. So she temporizes; and meanwhile puts off the evil hour from week to week, living at the expense of her friends in a round of visits, playing recklessly at bridge, and, of course, losing heavily, and foolishly accepting a rather large loan from a married man under the thin pretense that he has been speculating for her and has sold out at a profit. But these details merely skim the surface of a book which quite wonderfully and unsparingly probes into the deepest recesses of a woman's heart, dragging to the surface much that she would have refused to reveal even to herself. And back of this merciless analysis, and perhaps even bigger than it, is the sense of an inexorable logic of cause and effect which leads us by closely correlated steps from the moment when Lily Bart first breaks one of the unwritten laws of her social set by a brief visit to a man's bachelor apartments down to the hour when she renders her final account and the empty chloral bottle tells its story. It is easy for those who echo the modern cry for a spiritual "uplift" in fiction to carp at *The House of Mirth*. But the fact remains that the name of

Lily Bart will be handed down in the list of heroines with whom the well-read person is expected to be acquainted.

And now, quite briefly, let us look at *Madame de Treymes*, a slender, unpretentious little volume, which I believe, none the less, to represent Mrs. Wharton's high-water mark of attainment, almost flawless in structure and in content. It is an extremely simple story. John Durham had in the "old unrestricted New York days" known Fanny Frisbee long and intimately, but it never occurred to him to find her desirable until, fifteen years later, he met her once more in Paris as Madame de Malrive, separated, but not yet divorced from her husband. Her estrangement from her husband was now of five years' standing; so John Durham could see nothing premature or indelicate in urging his own claims and persuading her to seek her freedom through the courts. But he was destined to learn that in France, especially among the old families, there is a hereditary code so powerful as to make appeal to the courts well-nigh hopeless. Durham cannot understand; the law is the law, it all seems so simple. But Fanny de Malrive knows better; she has a little son whom she has pledged to bring up as a Frenchman; he is only half hers even now, and she must do nothing that will lessen her hold upon him, nothing that her husband's mother and sister and

uncle, the Abbé, do not approve. This sister, Madame de Treymes, holds the key to the situation. If Durham can meet her and win from her a statement whether or not the family will oppose a suit for divorce he and Fanny will know where they stand. The main story of the book is the contest between Durham and Madame de Treymes, the duel of verbal finesse that is like the crossing of fine, flexible rapiers, and, lastly, that wonderful final thrust through which Madame de Treymes by the very act of granting what he asks effects his total overthrow—and to her own surprise hurts herself almost as keenly as she hurts him. The book represents a high development of all of Mrs. Wharton's admitted qualities; and beyond these it has a more perfect technique of form and a greater sense of real sympathy with the people of her creation than anything she has written before it or since.

NEWTON BOOTH TARKINGTON

Upon renewing acquaintance with *The Gentleman from Indiana*, from the vantage ground of a ten-year interval, one realizes by what a narrow margin Mr. Tarkington rescued the born story teller within him from the would-be maker of purposeful and serious fiction. This book in fact represents a parting of two ways, a battle-ground between two opposing impulses, two widely divergent views of the aims and ambitions of a novelist,—and for that reason it fails, in spite of occasional strength, to be a really good book, a piece of symmetrical and finished workmanship. Although it was his first published work, *The Gentleman from Indiana* was far from being Mr. Tarkington's first attempt at fiction. It has often been told that the germ of *The Two Vanrevels* was a short story of two thousand words written many years earlier; and that while *The Gentleman from Indiana* was not begun until 1898, *Monsieur Beaucaire* was written a year earlier and *Cherry* not only antedates them both but was accepted as a two-part serial at a time when its author was practically unknown. In a lengthy critical study

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of Mr. Tarkington's writings, Arthur Bartlett Maurice rather happily conjectures that "Perhaps it was of himself and of his own disillusionment that he was thinking when he described in *The Gentleman from Indiana* John Harkless occupied with a realization that 'there had been a man in his class whose ambition needed no restraint, his promise was so complete—in the strong belief of the University, a belief that he could not help knowing—and that seven years to a day from his Commencement this man was sitting on a fence rail in Indiana.'" And Mr. Maurice hereupon adds, "sitting on a rail-fence in Indiana was figuratively just what Tarkington was doing from 1893 to 1899."

Now, in order to understand how the author of *Monsieur Beaucaire* ever happened to write *The Gentleman from Indiana*, it is necessary to keep just a few facts in mind. In the first place, Mr. Tarkington had throughout these seven years been vainly trying to obtain a public hearing and had been persistently denied. Even after *Cherry* had been accepted for magazine publication, the editor seems to have had a sober second thought and the manuscript was side-tracked until the subsequent success of his other stories gave it an unforeseen and extrinsic value that hurried it into print. Secondly, in the closing years of the nineteenth century, there came a sudden demand for

a rather serious type of political novel and of the novel that professed to study the social and economic problems of American life and especially of life in the West. The times were ripe for just such books as Brand Whitlock's *Thirteenth District*, Mr. Tarkington's *Gentleman from Indiana*, *The Virginian* of Owen Wister and, bigger and greater than these, *The Pit* and *The Octopus* of Frank Norris which were to come later. It was quite natural, quite pardonable, that a young man in Mr. Tarkington's position, sobered by discouragement, should have attempted for once to meet a specific popular demand,—especially when the attempt to meet it meant no greater effort than simply to open his eyes and set down faithfully what he could see from his viewpoint on the fence rail, and what he thought about the things that he saw.

Unfortunately, this method of work, which to many another writer is the simplest and most congenial, was one which Mr. Tarkington, with the best intentions in the world, found himself unable to sustain. He is of those whose worship of the God of Things-as-They-Are is at best an outward show. The mantle of realism is upon his shoulders a curious misfit; and he has done wisely in discarding it. *The Gentleman from Indiana* is a luminous object-lesson. There are in it two interwoven stories so radically different in

their spirit, their outlook upon life and the key in which they are told that it is rather difficult to say with any assurance which of these two was Mr. Tarkington's starting-point, and just what important thought, if any, he undertook to develop. Apparently his theme was something of this nature: When a discouraged young man from the East,—discouraged because he knows that he has the ambition and the energy to succeed but lacks the opportunity,—finds himself at last in a somnolent Western town and by remorselessly driving himself day and night succeeds in instilling some sort of life into that town and at the same time making himself the most important and most respected of all its citizens: he is quite likely not to see that success is already holding out her hands to him; quite likely to feel that he is stagnating, wasting his strength and his years in a jumping-off place from which there is no escape,—and all the while he is building for himself unconsciously a big and splendid future. This is what I think that Mr. Tarkington was trying to say: that the surest way to play a big part before a large audience to-morrow, is to play your little part before your small audience to-day and to be sure that you play it with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind. The trouble with *The Gentleman from Indiana*, which might so easily have been made a really big book, is that in trying

to say this Mr. Tarkington said it so very badly. The book makes one think of a long steel girder which has buckled and broken in the middle from sheer structural weakness. Harkless, the young Easterner, who has come to the town of Plattville and invested his last dollar in the *Carlow County Herald*, accomplishes a number of rather difficult things with almost too much ease and promptness. He rescues the paper from a moribund condition and makes it a recognized local force; he drives an unscrupulous political boss from power, and ushers in a new era of honest government; he declares war against the lawless band of "White-Caps," who constitute the squalid settlement at Six-Cross-Roads, and for years have terrorized the neighborhood; and his crusade results in landing a considerable number of them in state's prison. The remaining "White-Caps," however, have sworn vengeance; and because he will not take their threats seriously, and will not guard himself properly, they catch him one night on a lonely road; and on the morrow there remains no sign of him save some footprints in the mud and trampled grass. Suspicion is divided between the "White-Caps" and a couple of "shell-men," whom Harkless had been instrumental in driving out of town. Public opinion condemns the "White-Caps," and a well-equipped lynching party is proceeding to make short work of them,

when a telegram arrives from the neighboring city of Rouen:

Found both shell-men. One arrested at noon in a second-hand clothes store, wearing Harkless's hat, also trying to dispose torn full-dress coat known to have been worn by Harkless last night. Stains on lining believed blood. Second man found later at freight-yards in empty lumber car left Plattville 1 P.M., badly hurt, shot and bruised. . . . Hurt man taken to hospital unconscious. Will die. Hope able question him first and discover whereabouts body.

Now the details of what happened at the Six-Cross-Roads, and what share the shell-men had in it need not concern us here. The above telegram is quoted solely for the sake of pointing out the big dramatic possibilities of the subsequent scene when a delegation from Plattville arrive at the Rouen hospital, in order to take the shell-man's dying confession, and the mass of bruised flesh and broken bones opens its eyes, and the white, scarred lips move and speak with the voice of Harkless. This is all good workmanship; the surprise, when it comes, is complete; and the whole story has been worked up slowly, carefully, with a painstaking diligence of details, an ingenious plausibility that effectually veil the underlying melodrama. But it is just at this point that the girder breaks and the book's structure goes to

pieces. There is, of course, the usual obligatory young woman in the story,—although up to this point it has not seemed needful to the present writer to make mention of her. She is known as Helen Sherwood, and, like Harkless, is an outsider, being in Plattville only on a visit; but in reality she is only the Sherwoods' adopted daughter, and her father is old, broken-down Frisbee, whom Harkless has befriended and saved from drinking himself to death. Now, what Mr. Tarkington, in the naïveté of early authorship, asks us to believe is this: that while Harkless lies in the Rouen Hospital, fighting for life, inch by inch, Helen Sherwood,—*née* Frisbee,—with the courage of utter ignorance, rushes into the breach, and with no newspaper training, no knowledge of politics, no practical experience of life, proceeds to edit the *Carlow County Herald*, to increase its size, to build up its circulation, and—most amazing of all—to start a campaign in favor of Harkless that results in securing him the nomination to Congress. All this is sheer romanticism, and if taken at its face value is exceedingly "good fun." But, unfortunately, the first half of the book was conceived in a sane and sober spirit of actuality,—and that is why the first and second section of the book part company with a violence like that of a railway train if a switch were suddenly misplaced beneath the middle car.

The purpose of giving so much space to *The Gentleman from Indiana* is not solely in order to show its structural defects. It is a book which one may quite sincerely like without being blind to its faults. It bristles with absurdities, yet in spite of them, one cannot help feeling the warm, lovable human nature in its characters. To create characters that seem thoroughly alive is part of the inborn gift of the true story teller, and no amount of farce or melodrama will quite hide it. But characters endowed with the breath of life are not the exclusive prerogative of either romance or realism. If on the one hand we have Major Pendennis and Colonel Newcome, on the other we have D'Artagnan and Chicot the Jester—equally alive, equally impossible to forget. It still remained to be seen which of the two methods was Mr. Tarkington's natural medium. The publication of *Monsieur Beaucaire* promptly solved the doubt. No one but a born romanticist could have written that dainty and consistent bit of fictional artistry. It had no more serious excuse for existence than a miniature on ivory or a finely-cut cameo,—and it needed none. Its best excuse was the blitheness of its mood, the symmetry of its form, the swiftness of its action, the tingling vitality of it, from start to finish. But it immediately, and once for all, defined Mr. Tarkington's proper sphere and limitations. It proved him

one of those writers whose stories, whenever and wherever laid, should carry with them something of the "once-upon-a-time" atmosphere,—the fitting atmosphere of the story that aims frankly to entertain. It reduced at once to an absurdity the bare idea of Mr. Tarkington's ever again attempting to write a novel opening with such prosaic actuality as "There is a fertile stretch of flat lands in Indiana where unagrarian Eastern travelers, glancing from car-windows, shudder and return their eyes to interior upholstery." From the clumsy heaviness of *The Gentleman from Indiana* to the debonair self-mastery of *Monsieur Beaucaire* is indeed a rather far cry.

But it is precisely this type of a story which has the most to lose in the retelling. Something of its fragile charm must inevitably brush off at the first careless touch like the golden pollen on a butterfly's wings. It is less a tale than an episode in the life of a princely young Frenchman who, temporarily out of favor at court, is sojourning incognito in England and falls under the spell of "gold and snow and the blue sky of a lady's eyes." Now Monsieur Beaucaire, so it is rumored, has come to England as a valet in the suite of M. de Mirepoix, the French ambassador. For this reason he has been publicly rebuffed in the pump-room at Bath by no less a personage than

Beau Nash; and for a time he lives quietly and is visited surreptitiously by just a few men of fashion, who know him only as a professional gambler but believe that his play is honest. The story opens at the moment when Beaucaire catches the Duke of Winterset in the act of cheating at cards, and as a price of his silence forces Winterset to introduce him into the upper social circles at Bath as the Duc de Chateaurien,—of Castle-Nowhere. He has only to strip off his imposing mustachios and his black peruque and shake down the sparkling curls of his yellow hair to make the transformation complete. As Duc de Chateaurien, vouched for by Winterset, he meets and woos the Lady Mary Carlisle, the most beautiful woman in England, on whom Winterset has already turned a covetous glance. This is the reason why Winterset does not keep his pledge of silence, and why he spreads the rumor that the successful suitor for the hand of Lady Mary Carlisle is none other than Victor, the barber, and Beaucaire, the gambler. And one clear September night, when the mists were rising slowly from the fields and the moon was radiant overhead and "all of Bath that pretended to fashion" was present at a certain fête at a country house in the neighborhood, Monsieur Beaucaire seized the opportunity while escorting the Lady Mary's carriage to bring his suit to some definite issue, when

suddenly a party of horsemen charged down the highway, raising the battle-cry of "Barber! Kill the barber!" And being six to one, they overcame Monsieur Beaucaire, bound him and would have shamefully beaten him before the Lady Mary's eyes had not his belated servants arrived in the nick of time to save him. The attacking party, however, had already branded him as an impostor,—and as he stands there, slowly bleeding from a hidden wound and held erect only by indomitable pride, he sees belief fade out from the blue sky of Lady Mary's eyes and limitless scorn take its place. The climax comes two weeks later when Beaucaire, though warned to quit the country, reappears in the pump-room of Bath, his incognito laid aside, and is formally presented to the Lady Mary and his enemies as "His Highness, Prince Louis-Philippe de Valois, Duke of Orleans, Duke of Chartres, Duke of Nemours, Duke of Montpensier, First Prince of the Blood Royal,"—the list trails on indefinitely while a by-standing Frenchman murmurs in an aside, "Old Mirepoix has the long breath, but it take' a strong man two day' to say all of the names." It is here in the final page that Mr. Tarkington gives the one last artistic touch: Monsieur Beaucaire forgives the Lady Mary for her bitter mistake: "It is—nothing—less than nothing. There is—only jus' one woman—in the—whole worl' who would not have

treat' me the way that you treat' me. It is to her that I am goin' to make reparation."

Cherry, written prior to either of the books already mentioned, followed next in order of publication. It is not one of Mr. Tarkington's significant books, but it attracts attention because of the whimsical nature of its theme and its still odder setting,—for it is a story of a college student in the days preceding the American Revolution. It is told in the first person by a certain Mr. Sudgeberry, intolerably priggish, incredibly self-satisfied, who at the age of nineteen is finishing his third year of study at Nassau Hall. Mr. Sudgeberry is, so far as his preoccupation with himself will permit, deeply enamored of a young woman, a certain Miss Sylvia Gray, who is addicted to cherry-colored ribbons and who is curiously tolerant of one of Sudgeberry's classmates, one William Fentriss, whose riotous and ungodly mode of life Sudgeberry sternly condemns. The exaggerated pedantry, the unbelievable thickheadedness of Sudgeberry, while cleverly sustained, become wearisome when prolonged throughout a hundred and seventy-four pages. The story of a girl who while accepting attentions from one man amuses herself by keeping another dangling upon the string and using him to keep her father engaged in conversation is too flimsy material from which to make a novel, even when eked out by a

lovers' quarrel, a burlesque highway robbery and rescue and Christmas chimes presaging marriage bells.

No author can produce three volumes of such varying degrees of merit and of success, without learning a good deal about his readers and about himself. What Mr. Tarkington seems to have learned pretty thoroughly was that, whether the general public did or did not care for serious fiction,—problem novels with weighty lessons behind them,—from him at least they asked only entertainment,—and that entertainment was the commodity that he could most easily afford them. Accordingly he wrote *The Two Vanrevels*, a novel of the high-class comedy type, blithe, wholesome, optimistic, peopled with men of old-fashioned courtliness and women of gracious manners and soft-voiced charm. Technically, it was a better piece of work than *The Gentleman from Indiana*, which in date of composition immediately preceded it; the plot structure, although frail in substance, showed careful workmanship; the character drawing was done with a surer touch; and, best of all, Mr. Tarkington knew precisely in what key he was pitching his story, and he held to that key from first to last. There is nowhere in it the least suggestion of an attempt to pretend that it is anything else than sheer romanticism, which here and there trespasses across the border-line

of melodrama. The setting is once more the Indiana which Mr. Tarkington knows so well; but he secures that rose-tinted mist of distance, so essential to romance of this type, by throwing back the time of action a couple of generations, to the days just preceding the outbreak of the Mexican war. As in all three of the earlier stories, the plot turns upon a prolonged misunderstanding; and, as in two out of the other three, the nature of the misunderstanding is a mistaken identity. And herein lies the inherent weakness of *The Two Vanrevels*, the lack of plausibility that no amount of verbal dexterity quite succeeds in disguising. Where a story hinges upon the chance confusion, in the mind of a young girl, of one man for another, in a town where every one knows every one else, and she is constantly meeting first one of the two men and then the other, at all sorts of social functions, talking with them, dancing with them, liable at any moment to hear them addressed by name: under such circumstances the difficulty of carrying conviction increases with each additional page of the story. In *Monsieur Beaucaire* the hero's identity is an easily kept secret because it is shared by no one but his loyal servants,—and *Monsieur Beaucaire* had the further advantage of being very short. In *The Gentleman from Indiana* the fact that the heroine is the substitute editor on the *Carlow County Her-*

ald is easily kept from the hero because he is flat on his back in a hospital ward in another town many miles distant,—and there is the further advantage that the secret had to be kept throughout only a third of the volume. In *The Two Vanrevels* Miss Betty Carewe's blunder in taking Tom Vanrevel and Crailey Gray each for the other is the very essence of the whole book, its starting-point, its continued suspense, its culminating tragedy, its sole excuse for being. It would have served admirably as the sub-structure of a short story, in which form Mr. Tarkington is said originally to have conceived it; but as a full-length novel, in spite of a great deal of ingenuity, one feels that the situation is forced, artificial and perilously near a breakdown at almost any moment. Old Robert Carewe has the reputation of being not only the richest man but the best hater in the community; and at the time that his daughter Betty bids farewell to her convent school and comes home, his long-standing feud with the Vanrevels has blazed up with renewed heat. In his opinion, openly expressed, the law firm of Vanrevel and Gray is made up of a knave and a fool,—and in this opinion he is not in the slightest degree shaken by the fact that the public at large has never made up its mind which of the two it loves the more: steady, loyal, wholly dependable Tom Vanrevel or light-hearted, fickle, fascinating and

utterly untrustworthy Crailey Gray. Betty Carewe, warned by her father that if young Vanrevel ever dares set foot inside his grounds he will shoot him on sight, finds a delicious and perilous joy in clandestine meetings with the man she thinks her father's enemy but who in reality is Crailey Gray: and all the while she is hearing disgraceful, scandalous tales of Crailey Gray and because of them doing her best to make herself hate and despise the man whom she fell in love with at first sight and who of course is the real Vanrevel. The story proceeds with clever artistry to its inevitable melodramatic tragedy and would deserve to rank rather high among Mr. Tarkington's productions excepting for the fact that we cannot escape from a sense of its being in a measure expert jugglery, a *tour de force* of a literary prestidigitateur.

Next, in order of time, comes a volume of short stories of such wide divergence of merit that one suspects some of them at least to belong to a rather early period. Nevertheless, they deserve for certain easily explained reasons somewhat more serious attention than Mr. Tarkington's critics have chosen hitherto to give them. The title of the volume is *In the Arena* and the theme of every one of the six stories, directly or indirectly, is political. These stories are quite serious studies of existing conditions in American politics, as

Mr. Tarkington sees them; and it proves that while he is unable to do a sustained, full-length novel in this serious vein he can keep it up quite easily so long as he confines himself to the short-story dimension. It is hard to discriminate in favor of any one story over the others. There is a great deal of human nature in "The Need of Money," in which we are told how it happened that Uncle Billy Rollinson, a life-long democrat and "a man as honest as the day is long," one day so voted as to kill a party measure and was in consequence read out of his party. And then there is that delightful bit of social and political satire combined entitled "Mrs. Protheroe." It recounts the Waterloo of a certain Alonzo Rawson, who happened once upon a time to be the senator from Stackpole. Now Alonzo was a raw-boned, half-educated, intensely earnest young man who took his duties, especially those connected with the drains-and-dikes committee, with such solemnity that he nightly prayed on his knees for guidance. Of course a young man of Alonzo's education and environment could not have been expected to fathom the wiles and fascinations of a creature of infinite resources and sagacity such as Mrs. Protheroe, social butterfly and veteran lobbyist, proved herself to be. The odds were really unfair and from the moment of his first encounter he was lost. The cause of his downfall was a cer-

tain Sunday Baseball Bill which he was pledged to oppose, which with untrained but moving eloquence he had already publicly denounced,—and which Mrs. Protheroe succeeded in convincing him was a generous and noble measure on behalf of the down-trodden working-man. It happened that Mrs. Protheroe owned the local baseball grounds, the rent of which would have doubled if they could have been used on Sunday,—but this the senator from Stackpole did not know until afterwards. His moral back-somersault was dexterously turned, his final speech in favor of the bill was an able effort and all might have gone well but for the unfortunate circumstance that a political opponent had happened to see him at the crucial moment when behind a sheltering screen of palms he had rashly kissed Mrs. Protheroe, and the news thereof had been disseminated throughout the senate.

A particular interest, however, attaches to the last story in the volume entitled "Great Men's Sons." The occasion of the story was a certain performance of *L'Aiglon* at the time when Madame Sarah Bernhardt and Monsieur Coquelin were touring the country. The story, however, concerns *L'Aiglon* only indirectly. In the audience on the night in question there is a certain thin old man with a grizzled chin-beard and a high-pitched voice; his name, so Mr. Tarkington

explains, is Tom Martin, and his home a small country town, where he commands the trade in Dry-Goods and Men's Clothing. It is after the play that Tom Martin permits himself to tell Mr. Tarkington what he thinks of the performance: "They seemed to be doing it about as well as they could," but he thinks they were badly handicapped by the play itself:

> Folks always like to laugh at a great man's son and say *he* can't amount to anything. Of course that comes partly from fellows like that ornery little cuss we saw to-night, thinkin' they're a good deal because somebody else done something and the somebody else happened to be their paw; and the women run after 'em, and they git low-down like he was, and so on. . . . I read the book in English before I come up, and it seemed to me he was pretty much of a low-down boy, yet I wanted to see how they'd make him out, hearin' it was thought, the country over, to be such a great play.

Hereupon, the old man wanders off, with apparent irrelevance, to a story about a certain fellow-townsman of his, "Orlando T. Bickner's boy, Mel." It is a simple, plainly-told tale of silent self-sacrifice and splendid courage, showing how a young fellow with the right kind of stuff in him fights an almost hopeless battle educating his sisters and younger brother, holding the family

together, keeping his mother from want and winning the love and respect of the whole community. And then, on the threshold of achievement, he breaks down from overwork and dies as uncomplainingly as he had lived, without its ever once occurring to him that he had done anything more than his simple duty. But the story gets its point,—the kind of point that Mr. Tarkington in his later work is fond of making,—from the suggested contrast between the romantic glamor of thrones and titles and the simple pathos of actuality:

> Well, sir, I read that "Leglong" book down home so I thought I better come up and see it for myself, how it *was*, on the stage, where you could *look* at it: and—I expect they done it as well as they could. But when that little boy, that'd always had his board and clothes and education free, saw that he'd jest about talked himself to death, and called for the press notices about his christening to be read to him to soothe his last spasms—why, I wasn't overly put in mind of Melville Bickner.

Three more volumes need to be commented upon briefly, not because they serve to throw any new light upon Mr. Tarkington's methods but simply because they are exceedingly good of their kind. The first of these is *The Beautiful Lady*. Like *Monsieur Beaucaire*, it is merely a trifle, but a

very charming and a very perfect trifle. The opening scene is one of the open-air cafés in Paris at the corner of the Place de l'Opéra; the principal actor is one Ansolini, an impoverished Neapolitan who, in order to pay for the board and education of two little nieces, has accepted the humiliating office of being an animated billboard,—his head is shaven and adorned in brilliant letters with the legend: *Théâtre Folie Rouge, Revue de Printemps Tous les Soirs!* His contract obliges him to sit for weary hours day by day with his head bowed above one of the small café tables surrounded by a curious and jeering throng. Just once during all these days does he hear a word of sympathetic understanding. A woman clad in gray, whose voice proclaims that she is an American and that she is young, pauses before him and, far from seeing anything amusing in the sight, exclaims involuntarily, "Ah! the poor man!" She has perceived that he is a gentleman. This is the beginning of a delicately wrought idyl, the peculiar and illusive flavor of which is due in no small measure to the skill with which Mr. Tarkington makes the Neapolitan tell the story in a variety of English which he flatters himself is triumphantly idiomatic but which at times is fearfully and wonderfully constructed.

We come, next, to *The Conquest of Canaan.* The theme, briefly stated, is simply the difficulty

of living down a bad reputation after it has once been firmly established. Joe Louden found himself, at the age of nineteen, a much neglected and misunderstood young man, owing to the conditions of his home life after his father's second marriage with a widow having a son of about Joe's age. It was not unnatural that, failing to find human companionship among the more staid and respectable citizens of Canaan, he should seek it in the back rooms of saloons and in a still less savory resort known by the name of Beaver Beach. Naturally enough bad company begot bad manners; and at last a day came when a certain mad adventure won for him the enmity of Martin Pike, the smug, sanctimonious and utterly unscrupulous old millionaire who dominated Canaan with an iron hand. There was nothing left for Joe Louden to do but to leave Canaan, and for long years his whereabouts and his methods of life are an unknown quantity to his native town. In those earlier days Joe numbered among his acquaintances only one real friend of the better class. She was the grand-daughter of an impoverished painter, and her name was Ariel Tabor; she was shabby in dress and painfully conscious of it; and she had the shyness and the awkwardness of movement which in girlhood not infrequently are the forerunner of later grace and charm. But in those early days at least she was as far from winning the approval of Canaan's

autocrats as Joe himself, and their common grievance helped to cement their friendship. Seven years elapse between the time of Joe's disappearance and his return as a man sobered by hard experience, strong from his single-handed fight with the world, and ready now to settle down in his old home as a practising lawyer. To his amazement, he finds that the old prejudice against him is still smoldering, the bad name once attached to him has not been forgotten, the young men and women who knew him as boy imitate the example of priest and Levite and pass him by on the other side; the clerk at the National House curtly informs him that the rooms are all occupied; and the greetings of his father and relatives are even less cordial, his stepbrother sarcastically inquiring whether he has saved up enough money on which to starve. In short, all respectable Canaan conspires to drive him back to his old haunts and old companions; and he finds that if he is to stay in Canaan and fight for his rights he can do so only by seeking shelter at Beaver Beach and accepting the human scum and refuse of the place as his first clients.

Such is the beginning of a prolonged, tenacious, doggedly contested struggle which is destined to end in Joe Louden's complete and triumphant conquest of Canaan. From passive scorn the town soon awakes to active hostility, with Martin Pike, his

millions and his newspaper representing the intrenched forces of Canaan's respectability. From this point on the story becomes frank melodrama, of that glorified sort which could not be appreciated on Third Avenue. The shy, gauche Ariel Tabor returns from Europe transformed into a vision of feminine grace and charm, wreaks havoc with the male population of Canaan and gives to Joe the one needful incentive to keep him from weakening at the crucial moment of his fight. Joe promptly wins a series of great victories. He triumphs in a prolonged legal fight, although all public opinion is against him; he exposes the rascality of Martin Pike, who has nearly defrauded Ariel of a fortune; and the curtain is finally rung down upon him, as the curtain always should be rung down upon the hero of melodrama, in the hour of his exaltation as mayor-elect of Canaan and the accepted suitor of the woman he loves.

And lastly we have *The Guest of Quesney*, which some of Mr. Tarkington's more enthusiastic admirers have pronounced the best piece of fiction that he has yet produced. It is somewhat difficult for an impartial reader to find any adequate reason for thus discriminating against his earlier volumes. *The Guest of Quesney* is a readable story, with a picturesque setting and an atmosphere of considerable charm; it has an underlying mystery, so transparent that it ought to cease to mystify

any person of average intelligence at least as early in its progress as the fifth or sixth chapter; and it does contain one or two ideas of serious import. Yet, take it all in all, it is simply a new variation of the old Tarkington formula, a prolonged social tangle based upon mistaken identity,—with only this difference: that the person whose identity is in question is as much a puzzle to himself as to anyone else. Several years before the opening of the story, its heroine tried that familiar and dangerous experiment of marrying a dissolute wreck of a man with the intention of reforming him. The experiment resulted in the customary failure: the husband was before long making himself notorious on the Paris Boulevards in company with a Spanish dancer, and the outraged wife was seeking a divorce when a grim automobile accident very nearly crushed life out of him and completely crushed out all knowledge of himself, all memory of the past. The automobile accident, by the way, is a fine bit of pictorial sketching. Mr. Tarkington certainly has a rare gift, when he wants to use it, for freehand drawing of scenes of carnage. All of these dètails belong structurally to the prologue; the real story begins a couple of years later when a strikingly handsome young man with prematurely gray hair,—a young man who looks, so friends of the automobile victim say, as though he might have been the latter's younger brother or

his own better self at an earlier age,—makes his appearance in a little French village within easy walking distance of a château temporarily occupied by a beautiful stranger who is understood to be an American woman. The story is told in the first person by an American artist to whom at the outset none of the principal characters is personally known; and being himself much mystified, he succeeds in surrounding his people and his events with a certain amount of verbal fog. Nevertheless, it takes no great ingenuity to conjecture that the young man with the prematurely gray hair who looks out upon life with the wondering gaze of a child is the former dissolute husband whose accident has blotted out all memory of evil; and that the beautiful stranger at the château is the wife who, in spite of neglect and humiliation, has never ceased to care for him, and who now is tremulously fearful lest his loss of memory of other things involves also the memory of her. Persons whose past has been blotted out by some injury to the brain have been the theme of more novels than it would now be worth while to count. Mr. Tarkington in a measure justifies the use of an old idea by injecting into it this new suggestion: that we are all of us hampered by our memory of the past, handicapped by our knowledge of the evil in the world at large and more specifically in ourselves; and that if upon reaching maturity

some accident should blot all this out, leaving our minds as blank as in early childhood, and give us a chance to start over again, to ignore evil and learn only what is good, we might make of ourselves far nobler men and women than we were before. Mr. Tarkington contents himself with making this suggestion; he proves nothing, nor does he try to. His story ends on the threshold of the new life; and whether his hero is a permanently reformed character, or whether he slowly but inevitably drifts back into his old evil ways, remains tantalizingly an open question. But this does not alter the fact that the author has written a very agreeable Summer idyl pervaded by the soft sunshine, the fragrance of flowers and the singing of birds,—an atmosphere which altogether brings a thrill of nostalgia for the highways and byways of rural France.

These eight volumes pretty well sum up not only what Mr. Tarkington has done in prose fiction but what he is likely to achieve in the future. In spite of much diversity in time and setting, his talent is not an instrument of many notes; his themes, as already suggested, are few and oft repeated. The basis of every story he has written is a misunderstanding of one kind or another, of identity, of purpose, of character. He sees life, even the prosaic, every-day life of his home environment, through rose-tinted lenses that both

soften and magnify. He has an imperishable faith in the innate goodness of the human heart which, coupled with a wholesome scorn of sham and snobbery, gives to the people of his fantasy a certain whole-souled quality that makes them lovable even while we feel that they are a little bit too good to be true. All of these qualities offer in themselves as much promise of success in drama under existing conditions as in prose fiction; indeed one has only to glance at a play like *The Man from Home*,—in which his share in the collaboration with Mr. Wilson can be shrewdly guessed between the lines,—to see how every one of his favorite tricks in his novels is there reproduced with even more felicitous effect. There again, in that play, we have a situation depending on a whole series of misunderstandings and mistaken identities: a Russian prince masquerading as a simple German traveler, an escaped anarchist disguised as a chauffeur, a whole group of adventurers and tricksters, male and female, passing themselves off as shining lights of European aristocracy and the Man from Home himself voluntarily posing as a very simple homespun personality, but in reality the brightest, keenest, most indomitable personality in the whole group. And here, more than anywhere in his novels, Mr. Tarkington allows himself to fall back upon that favorite makeshift of the romanticist, Coincidence. Every-

thing happens in the nick of time. A person's name is mentioned, and miraculously he appears upon the scene; a secret is whispered, and somewhere a window or door opens stealthily and the secret is overheard. A tangle of situations is tightly knotted up and the only people who can unravel it are supposedly scattered widely throughout Europe and Asia,—and presto, they are all discovered simultaneously beneath the roof of a Sicilian hotel. Here, indeed, we have the very essence of Booth Tarkington; from first to last, under various disguises, he has always been, as he is to-day, a successful exponent of glorified melodrama.

"O. HENRY"

"O. HENRY"

It is a sufficiently common figure of speech to characterize the careers of certain men as meteoric,—but usually with no conception of the length of time that it may have taken the meteor to gain the requisite velocity and momentum to produce its brief, fiery burst, and no thought of the stray fragments that remain after the burst is over to awaken the curious appreciation of the enlightened few. If we accept this broader view, then "O. Henry" was quite literally a literary meteor. Although he had served an apprenticeship of a score of years, he remained, up to within half a decade of his death, practically unknown to the general reading public; and by them, in half a decade more, he will already have begun to be forgotten. Yet for just a few intervening years he achieved a popularity unparalleled in its swift development and its extent by any modern American writer of short stories. And not least surprising was the variety of taste to which he appealed, the range in education, culture and social grade of his reading public. Considered as an article of merchandise, his stories have commanded a market rate rivaled only by Mr. Kipling; con-

sidered as literature, they have formed the theme of more than one grave and reverend professor of English Letters. The meteor has blazed, and burst, and burned itself out; and the interesting question not unnaturally arises, To what extent was "O. Henry's" vogue justified? Is the popular verdict greatly in error? Does his fame of the passing hour rest upon a solid foundation?

One takes up the answer with a certain amount of diffidence. As was said in another critical article in one of the magazines quite recently, but while the author of *Cabbages and Kings* was still with us, such matters "rest upon the knees of the Gods." It is always easier to dogmatize as to what posterity ought to do than to predict what that profoundly unknown quantity really will do. Nevertheless, certain opinions may be ventured with some assurance, provided we base them, first, upon a few established facts regarding the personal "O. Henry,"—his life, his temperament, his attitude towards his craft,—and secondly, upon the really salient points of his own productions.

In the first place, then, at the risk of tediously repeating what has recently become a commonplace of the daily press, let us summarize the main facts in the life of this particular American story teller. That his real name was Sidney Porter and that he happened to be born in Greensborough,

North Carolina, in the year 1867, is not material; but it helps to complete the record. The fact that his health, as a boy, was rather poor and that consequently he was sent to a Texan ranch at a time when otherwise he would have gone to college, has a more direct bearing upon our problem. He was not of the stuff from which ranchmen and cowboys are made; and, although with characteristic facility he picked up his surprising amount of the picturesque idiom of the ranch, a scant three years had satiated him with the life. All this time, somewhere in the back of his mind had lurked persistently the ambition to write. Perhaps one of the most curious facts in the world of letters is the unlikely sources from which the public favorites among writers spring. When one sees the apparent hopelessness of conditions that have given birth to some of the successful fiction makers of to-day, even the most self-confident critic hesitates to say to an apparently hopeless novice: Give it up! there is no chance for you.

The life of the ranch had re-established Mr. Porter's health. Following the insistent call of Letters, he went to Houston and secured a position on a daily paper, *The Post*. It is curious how biographers insist upon mixing up essentials and non-essentials. Much has been made of the fact that the Houston *Post* paid Mr. Porter fifteen dollars a week and that the editor assured him

that within five years he would be earning a hundred a week on a New York newspaper. So far as this means anything, it means that Mr. Porter must have been more successful as a reporter than the editor was as a prophet. Many more than five years passed before he reached New York. The essential facts, so far, are that he had an inborn desire to write, a frail constitution which debarred him from a college education and the good luck to strike almost simultaneously a healthful climate and a newspaper opening. The following items have their importance: after a year on the *Post*, he went to Austin and purchased for the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars a newspaper named *The Iconoclast* from its owner, a certain Brann. The latter, having withdrawn to Waco, and perhaps regretting his bargain, asked Mr. Porter to give him back the paper's name. Our author, with characteristic generosity, consented and rechristened his own paper *The Rolling Stone*. Whatever symbolism there may be in names, this particular paper promptly rolled itself out of existence, and the future "O. Henry" went into voluntary exile in Central America. The fact that he went there with a friend who "intended to go into the fruit business, but didn't," is evidence of a credulity characteristic of him, not only then but later,—as subsequent anecdotes show.

What he did and what he saw in Central America, one gleans between the lines of *Cabbages and Kings;* but the one authentic bit of autobiography of that period is the single laconic sentence: "Most of the time I knocked around with the refugees and consuls." Mr. Porter's subsequent movements are given still more briefly in the few meager printed accounts. He returned to Texas, thence removed to New Orleans, "where he began more consistently to work as a writer"; and in 1902 came to New York, having received from *Ainslee's Magazine* the offer of one hundred dollars apiece for a dozen stories. From that time, until his death, Mr. Porter made New York his home, exhibiting that extreme, almost exaggerated affection for the metropolis that is peculiar to the Manhattanite by adoption.

Now, the years about which we know the least are probably the important ones, the years of growth and slow accretion. The record, as it stands, fails to explain. It shows a man of naturally roving spirit, whose schoolbook has been experience, hard and practical, and who toiled for twenty years before beginning to reap his reward. It is easy enough to write sagely that "his wanderings have influenced his work"; that "Texas gives the setting of short stories called *The Heart o' the West*"; that "Central America is the scene of *Cabbages and Kings*," and that New

York gives the background for *The Four Million*, *The Voice of the City* and *The Trimmed Lamp*. This all sounds as though it meant something; but in reality it does not. There are probably many thousands of people whose lot in life has taken them successively to Texas, to Central America and to New York,—yet there is only one "O. Henry." What would really be worth knowing is what he was thinking about, through all those formative years; what books he read, and which especially impressed him; what sort of work, in kind and quality, he did on the various newspapers with which he connected himself; and above all, where he learned his technique of the short story, and what models, if any, he consciously imitated. Of all this we have only a few meager and tantalizing glimpses, like the following paragraph, published in a comparatively recent interview:

I did more reading between my thirteenth and nineteenth years than I have done in all the years that have passed since then. And my taste at that time was much better than it is to-day; for I used to read nothing but the classics. Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* and Lane's translation of the *Arabian Nights* were my favorites.

The *Anatomy of Melancholy* and the *Arabian Nights* are indisputably classics; but there is noth-

ing in either that could have given a hint of that nice economy of means, that unerring instinct for ending a story at just the right instant, and with just the right phrase, that makes so many of "O. Henry's" stories models of technical skill. Because of this constructive gift, he has not infrequently been hailed as the "Yankee Maupassant"; and yet those who knew him best give assurance that "O. Henry" either never made the acquaintance of the author of *La Parure*, or else read him only after the great bulk of his own writings was completed. And it is equally doubtful whether he became acquainted with French technique through what is probably the next best medium,—the short stories of H. C. Bunner. Apparently the "O. Henry" story is to a large extent an independent development, born of an instinct for getting the sharpest possible narrative effects.

Now, it is idle to deny many of "O. Henry's" very genuine merits. He was technically a master of his craft, even though to the practised eye certain tricks of his trade stick out somewhat conspicuously. He had mingled on terms of frank comradeship with all sorts and conditions of men, the tramp, the clerk, the ward politician, the city policeman, the shop and factory girl, the human derelict at home and abroad; and he has a faculty compared by more than one critic to that of Dickens, for catching both the humor and the

pathos of these alien lives. Mr. Francis Hackett, writing recently in the Chicago *Evening Post*, made the following comment:

> To O. Henry, the clerk is neither abnormal or subnormal; he is simply $15-a-week humanity. He has specialized in this humanity with loving care, with a Kiplingesque attention to detail. But his is far from the humorless method of Gissing and Merrick, who were no more happy in a boarding-house than Thoreau would have been happy in the Waldorf-Astoria.

One is tempted to ask parenthetically why, in the name of all that makes good art, an author should be required to be happy in a boarding-house, or a corner grocery, or an east-side tenement, in order to write of them truly and with understanding. The important fact is not whether "O. Henry" was happy in the company of clerks, but whether he understood them,—and of this his stories leave not the shadow of a doubt. It is true, however, that "O. Henry's" likes and dislikes do occasionally intrude themselves between the story and the reader,—and to the lover of a finished art, this is not a merit, but quite distinctly a fly in the ointment of our enjoyment.

Another quality for which "O. Henry" has been overpraised by nearly every writer who has

attempted a critical analysis of his work, is the excellence of his local descriptions, the accuracy with which he makes you feel that a certain story not only happened in New York, but that it was part and parcel of the city itself, and of no other place in the world. It is extremely enlightening, as regards "O. Henry's" attitude towards fiction in general and towards his own work in particular, to read the following frank confession:

People say I know New York well! But change Twenty-third Street in one of my New York stories to Main Street, rub out the Flatiron Building and put in the Town Hall. Then the story will fit just as truly elsewhere. At least I hope this is the case with what I write. So long as your story is true to life, the mere change of local color will set it in the East, West, South or North. The characters in the *Arabian Nights* parade up and down Broadway at midday or Main Street in Dallas, Texas.

When I recently ran across this paragraph for the first time, it gave me a rather keen delight; because, personally, I never could see the excellence of "O. Henry's" local color; I never could feel that a few names of streets and buildings, printed with capital letters, sufficed to give the illusion of that indefinable atmosphere which a person born and bred in a certain city absorbs from a thousand subtle little sights and sounds and smells,

such as that city and none other has to offer. It is a comfort to discover, not merely that the fault was not a lack of perception on my part, but a deliberate choice upon the part of "O. Henry,"—in short, that he not only neglected an essential article in Maupassant's declaration of faith as an artist, but that he openly avowed his disbelief in it. It would be interesting to know what he would have thought of Flaubert's insistence upon the supreme necessity, if you are describing only a tree, a horse or a dog, of catching its special physiognomy so unerringly that it could not be confused with any other tree, horse or dog in the whole world.

Yet it is easy to understand "O. Henry's" vogue; he appealed to a wide range of men and women, because he wrote of a wide range with sympathy and understanding. He appealed to the wide class that is repelled by anything like academic nicety of speech, by the raciness of his phrase and vocabulary, his habit of making the English language a servant rather than a master. Much of his humor lies in his verbal audacities,—and for that very reason he is doomed within a decade to seem in a measure already out of date. And his habit of invoking local and temporal allusions, not merely as subordinate details, but at times as the turning-point of a story, is another factor that will hasten the wane of his popularity. Take,

for example, one of the best stories that he ever wrote, "The Rose of Dixie." It is a story of an old Southern colonel, who has undertaken to edit a magazine exclusively in the interests of the "fair daughters and brave sons" of Dixieland. Handicapped by the Colonel's strong sectional prejudices, the magazine is not a financial success; so the stockholders suggest that the aid of a certain Thacker, famed for his successes in forcing up the circulation of lagging periodicals, shall be invoked. The Colonel rejects Thacker's much too radical suggestions, but at the same time hints mysteriously at an important article that he has on hand, an article brimful of wise philosophy of life,—but unfortunately written by one regarding whose qualifications he has not yet sufficiently informed himself. The tale, in order to be appreciated, has to be read. No amount of skill in epitomizing can begin to convey the humor of the dénouement, when the article at last appears with the title emblazoned with local significance, in prominent full-faced type, and the name of the author so minute as to be almost illegible, below it,—and that, too, the name of one who, at the time the "Rose of Dixie" was written, happened to be Chief Executive of the nation! A generation hence, the edge of the joke will be quite gone; indeed, it is already somewhat dulled.

One disadvantage under which a writer of short stories labors is that it is out of the question to analyze at any length even a tithe of his writings. Thus, in the case of "O. Henry," one would be glad to dwell at some length upon each separate volume, to analyze the clever mechanism of *Cabbages and Kings*, whereby the reader is carried through a lengthy string of apparently slightly correlated tales, and does not suspect, until the final page is turned, that underlying them all is a mystery, a series of cross-purposes, straightened out only when two bits of human flotsam finally meet and exchange confidences on a North River pier in New York. But to stop long over any one volume, or even over any considerable number of stories, would serve no special purpose. The more you read them, the more you realize that there is a certain sameness about his themes and his structure, that he has just a few formulæ that he invokes over and over again. There is, for instance, the formula of cross-purposes, like the story, if memory is not at fault in details, of the man who pawned his watch, to buy his wife for Christmas a fur neck-piece to match her muff,—unaware that she in turn had sacrificed her muff, in order to buy him a watch-fob. Or again, there is the irony-of-fate formula, as exemplified in the story of "Soapy and the Anthem," in which a tramp, having made up his mind that a few

months on the island will be the pleasantest arrangement that he can make for winter, proceeds to attempt to get himself arrested, by swindling a restaurant keeper out of a meal, by breaking a window, by insulting a woman,—and all to no purpose; fate, under one guise or another, intervenes to defeat his plans. And then, at last, as he is passing a church door, and hears the swelling notes of a fine old anthem, some softening memory of childhood steals over him, and he finds himself, unkempt and ragged as he is, drawn irresistibly into the church, with a growing resolution to turn over a new leaf,—a policeman, deciding that he is lurking there for no good purpose, runs him in, and Soapy, now that he no longer wishes it, finds himself on his way to the Island.

And then again, there is what we may call the "inertia of human nature" formula,—the type of story based upon a subtle appreciation of the fact that people often think that they have learned a lesson, but, as soon as the stress is over, drop back again into their old rut. One of the best of this class is a story in the volume called *The Trimmed Lamp*. It is not necessarily the best of the collection, but somehow it made a rather special appeal to the present writer, and seems worth giving in some detail.

It is merely the story of a commonplace man married to a commonplace little wife and living

in a commonplace little apartment on a salary the smallness of which also seems to have the element of commonplaceness. A story, you will perceive, in which the temperamental barometer on the whole stands rather low. After the glamor of the honeymoon wore off, the man fell gradually into the habit of spending his evenings away from the home atmosphere. As surely as the hands of the clock came around to half-past eight he would reach for his hat. "Now, where are you going, I should like to know?" the wife's querulous voice would question, and his stereotyped answer would be flung back through the closing door, "Just going down to play pool with the boys for half an hour." But one night when he comes home there is no wife to meet him, no dinner waiting, nothing but a pervading disorder and a hasty note telling him that she has been called away by the sudden news of her mother's serious illness. Disconsolately he makes a comfortless meal from cold remnants found in the ice-box, the loneliness of the apartment each instant forcing itself into his consciousness. It is the first night since their marriage that she has been away from him, the first time that he has asked himself what life would be without her. He begins to regret the hours of her society he has voluntarily lost, the evenings he has gone out and left her to bear the same solitude from which he is now suffering. Never again, he tells

himself, never again! He will make it up to the little woman when she comes back, he will take her out more, to theaters and all that sort of thing; she shall never again be left to the ghastly loneliness of these silent rooms. And, in the midst of his good resolutions, the door opens and the wife walks in; mother's illness was a false alarm, she did not need to stay, after all. This topic occupies them until she finishes dinner. Then, as the hands of the clock move around to half-past eight, the man reaches mechanically for his hat. "Now where are you going, I should like to know?" comes the stereotyped question, with all its wonted querulousness; and the stereotyped answer comes back through the closing door, "Just going down to play pool with the boys for half an hour."

Yet, in the case of "O. Henry," more perhaps than in that of any other popular story writer of his generation, the relative merits and deficiencies of his stories are a matter of individual opinion. Discuss Kipling in any group of average well-read men and women, and you will find a certain amount of disagreement; some will hold that the earlier tales are easily superior to the later, and others will insist on the opposite view; some will maintain that "They" is his most finished masterpiece, the one story that stands alone upon a lofty height, and others will see little or nothing in it.

But on the whole, the world agrees pretty well in singling out "Without Benefit of Clergy," "The Drums of the Fore-and-Aft," "The Man Who Would Be King," "On the City Wall," "The Courtship of Dinah Shadd," while "An Habitation Enforced," "Mrs. Bathurst," and "A Deal in Cotton" would come in as pretty close seconds. But if you try the same experiment regarding "O. Henry's" stories, you will find a very different state of matters. Almost everyone present will have read him, and almost everyone will have his or her own personal preference, backed up by reasons to justify it. Half of the time they will not remember the title,—in spite of the pains that Mr. Porter is said to have taken over his titles, they are not of the kind that stick in the memory, —sometimes a good many of the details will have faded out; but what people remember is the sharp, unlooked-for twist at the end of the story, like the snap of a whip in a practised hand. Do you remember, someone is sure to ask, that story of the local champion prize-fighter, who is just starting in on his honeymoon, and whose bride expresses a wish for peaches? It is late at night; and even in New York, even in the ward where he is something of a power, peaches in the off-season are not easy to find. Everywhere he is offered oranges, big, thin-skinned, juicy oranges,—but not a peach is to be found. At last he remembers a cer-

tain high-life gambling resort, where everything is done in lavish style, and where the buffet is never lacking in luscious hothouse fruits. Now in all his devious career, he has stuck to his standards of loyalty, he has stood for a "square deal" among his kind. But to-night he is in a dilemma; his bride has demanded peaches, and peaches she must have, loyalty or no loyalty. Accordingly, he goes contrary to the ethics of his class, takes part in a police raid on the gambling house, and in the midst of a general rough-and-tumble fight, which is a gem of its kind, manages to make his escape with two rather dilapidated peaches. And now comes the snap of the whip; when he hands them to his expectant bride, she looks at them disappointedly, and says, "Oh, did I say peaches? It was oranges that I wanted!"

"You haven't told that quite right!" someone else rejoins, "you don't emphasize the oranges enough. Don't you remember that everywhere he goes they say to him, 'Now, if it was only oranges you wanted!' and at the last place, he turns on them savagely and interrupts with: 'If anyone dares to say oranges again to me, I'll—' and words fail him! But I'll tell you a story ever so much better than that, and that's the 'Jimmy Valentine' one. There's a short story that really has some substance to it, a short story that had in it the material of a full-length play. Supposing you should

give a story writer the following problem: Let the hero be a criminal, perhaps an escaped convict; under another name, he has found honest employment in a town where his past is not known; he has won the respect of his new friends, and the love of a good woman; his future seems assured. And suddenly, as he is in the act of destroying the only remaining evidences of the past, of cutting himself off even from the memory of his old life, fate brings him face to face with an extraordinary dilemma; someone very close to the woman he loves is in danger of death, tragic and agonizing; and it is only by revealing his crime-stained past, only by resorting to his criminal skill that he can save her. In other words, it is the man's reformation, his newly acquired tenderness of heart that is his undoing; there is the problem, —and if you assigned it to a score of writers, I doubt if one of them would have got a quarter of the possibilities out of it that 'O. Henry' did."

"That is all very well," objects someone else at this point, "'Jimmy Valentine' was a good job of its kind. But he deliberately spoiled it at the end by one sentimental touch, the popular happy ending. We all know that in real life the detective who had spent weary months in tracking down an escaped convict would not let him go at last, with the tools of his trade in his hands, just because

he 'cracked' a safe in time to save a child from smothering! But if you want 'O. Henry' at his best, take a story like the one about the little girl whose mother 'didn't like that she should play in the street,' and whose father, red-headed and sullen tempered, spent his Sunday afternoons sitting by the window, in his shirt-sleeves and with his heels on the ledge, leisurely emptying a tin can of beer. 'Papa, won't you play checkers with me?' the little girl asks wistfully. 'No, I'm busy; run along and play in the street,' growls the man, and the little girl goes, in spite of the mother's feeble protest, 'I don't like that she should play in the street.' Well, when we see that child again, a few years have passed; the street has done its worst for her, and she is in cruel trouble. The man whom she has loved too rashly openly favors another girl at a big East Side dance hall, when, true to her street training, she draws a knife, stabs her rival, and ends her misery in the East River. The scene shifts from this world to the next; an angel of the heavenly detective corps has brought up for judgment the bedraggled soul of a poor drowned girl, and is proceeding to press the charge. 'Hold on!' says St. Peter,—or words to that effect, 'You have arrested the wrong person. The one you want to look for is a red-headed man, in his shirt-sleeves, drinking beer on Sunday out of a tin can. You'll lose your job if you aren't more care-

ful; that's the fourth mistake you've made this week!'"

There, in brief, we have a fairly wide and representative selection of "O. Henry's" stories. They do not pretend to include even a tithe of those one would like to mention, if space allowed; yet such as are here included show him pretty nearly at his best, wisely comprehensive of human foibles, indulgently ironic, yet with an underlying touch of sympathy that illumines and softens much that is sordid and commonplace. That he was a genuine artist cannot be questioned; that he was overrated by his own people and generation is more than possible. That the large element of what was local and temporal is likely to prove a heavy handicap in the race for immortality cannot be denied. As Anatole France sagely remarked, "one must be light, in order to fly across the ages." At all events, frankness demands recognition of the fact that "O. Henry," while not limited to a narrow range, was not possessed of a conspicuously wide one; that he had already achieved enough on which to rest a substantial fame, and that it is doubtful whether, had he lived, he would ever have surpassed what he has already done. His early death has robbed us of the man, but in all likelihood it did not seriously rob him of any laurels.

GERTRUDE ATHERTON

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It was the *Saturday Review* which, about ten years ago, in discussing one of Mrs. Gertrude Atherton's novels, borrowed for its caption one of that author's own phrases, "Intellectual Anarchy." The tone of the article in question was that of incisive irony and unkind cleverness; nevertheless, this term, intellectual anarchy, may not unfairly be applied even by stanch admirers of Mrs. Atherton to a large part of her work, and may serve conveniently as a sort of condensed explanation both of the degree of success she has achieved and of her failure to gain certain greater heights which seem to have lain so easily within her reach.

Mrs. Atherton, it must be remembered, has had abundant opportunity for studying both life and literary methods in great extent and diversity. She knows and understands her native land, from California, which has served as a luminous background for much of her best work, clear to the eastern coast: to Washington, the complex social strata of which she has given us in *Senator North;* to New York and Westchester County that

she deftly satirized in *Patience Sparhawk;* to the Adirondacks that form the setting for the trenchant irony of her *Aristocrats:*—and, on the other hand, she has spent a large portion of her recent years in Europe, imbibing new impressions and methods, and also, it must be frankly admitted, yielding now and again to the temptation of laying in those foreign countries the scenes of several of her literary blunders. The net result of Mrs. Atherton's varied experiences and methods of self-training may be summed up as follows: that she has an uncommonly broad outlook upon life, an enviably rich equipment of material, and, side by side with these advantages, a wilful, almost illogical, independence, a persistent rebellion against the bondage of literary schools,—in short, a riotous freedom of style and construction that is not unfairly stigmatized as intellectual anarchy.

Consequently, it is somewhat difficult to do strict justice to Mrs. Atherton's contribution to American fiction; somewhat difficult accurately to take the measure of her achievement, and, while honestly pointing out wherein her shortcomings lie, to give her full credit for merits which have made her one of the forces that refuse to be disregarded in contemporary letters. In the first place, then, it is well to get clearly in mind the more obvious elements of strength in Mrs. Atherton's novels. She has the big advantage of see-

ing life with clear-eyed accuracy and without illusions. She is no idealist, inventing an imaginary world because the world of actuality happens at times to contain much that is sordid and painful. On the contrary, she faces unflinchingly the unpleasant truths of physical baseness and moral obliquity, mirroring them back with a fearlessness that compels recognition even from those who shrink from the naturalistic method. It is, of course, always rash to hazard a guess as to the source of any author's manner of procedure, but in the present case one ventures, with little fear of contradiction, the opinion that Mrs. Atherton owes to the French realistic school her interest in heredity, her frank treatment of the physical facts of life and her unusually wise understanding of the complex relation in all big human emotions and impulses between the flesh and the spirit, and the impossibility of saying that hate and love, jealousy and self-sacrifice can ever be purely physical or purely psychic in their origin. She is right in constantly insisting upon the blending of the two in all the relations of men and women; and upon her fearless treatment of problems of sex rests her best title to be considered an important factor in fiction. With the possible exception of the author of *Pigs in Clover*, she is the only woman now writing in English who is able to handle questions of sex with a masculine absence

of self-consciousness, and consequently with an absence of morbid exaggeration.

But, on the other hand, Mrs. Atherton has not acquired, along with a Continental frankness of speech, certain other qualities that are equally essential to the highest type of art: namely, a subtle nicety of construction, an appreciation of a finished technique. It is an inevitable consequence of her whole nature,—her rugged independence, her refusal to be hampered by technicalities of the art, her fearless brushing aside of any arbitrary barriers standing between her and the way in which she happens for the moment to feel like writing a particular story,—that almost without exception her books suffer from a faulty technique; almost without exception we feel that the basic idea behind each of them, the skeleton structure upon which they were reared, was worthy and capable of a development considerably beyond that which she finally achieved. It needs no very great critical acumen, no special experience in the art of story construction to realize that in all of Mrs. Atherton's books there is a large proportion of episode that is not vital to the development of the central theme; that there are a certain number of minor characters devoid of real structural importance, that there are frequently secondary themes interwoven with the central one which constitute what might, in the hack-

neyed phraseology of Mr. Kipling, be accurately designated as "another story"; and in some cases these secondary themes, these subordinate characters which might have become structurally important if carried through to the final chapter, suddenly drop out of sight midway through the book, leaving us impotently wondering why they were introduced at all. Indeed, one of the most obvious faults of Mrs. Atherton's special brand of realism is that she imitates too freely nature's inscrutable way of injecting into the intimate dramas of human life a multitude of apparently irrelevant details. It is, of course, a common, every-day experience to find all sorts of sordid and paltry interruptions from the outside world heedlessly intruding upon our intimate joys and sorrows. But there is no hard and fast rule ordaining the invariable occurrence of such interruptions, and the finer technique of fiction demands that their intrusion shall be reduced to a minimum. Otherwise, the main issue, the vital thing that the novelist has to say, runs the risk of becoming blurred, perhaps of being lost to sight altogether.

One of the axioms of literary criticism is that an author shall be judged not merely by what he has done, but also by what has been the nature of his intention. The initial difficulty that lies in the way of fairly judging Mrs. Atherton is that

it often becomes difficult to conjecture just what she really has intended to do. In several of her books, as we shall have occasion presently to observe in detail, she has apparently had in mind that epic breadth of subject and of treatment which characterizes the best work of Frank Norris, Robert Herrick, Ellen Glasgow and David Graham Phillips,—a big basic national problem, filling the whole background of the canvas; and against it some sharply defined personal tragedy, thrown out in bold relief in the middle of the picture. This, at least, one feels she has tried to accomplish; but she has fallen short of the accomplishment. The close connection between the general and the special theme, a connection that is vital to the achievement of any epic whether in prose or in verse, is either wanting altogether or else too weak to fulfil its purpose. One sees, or rather half suspects, a number of symbolic characters and episodes planned apparently to develop and accentuate the epic scheme, but they are either abortive or else so obscure that one hesitates to venture an opinion as to what the author's intent really was, feeling moderately certain that, if consulted, she would probably declare that she had no such intent at all.

Altogether, the literary methods of Mrs. Atherton may be summed up briefly as extraordinarily variable and arbitrary, and nevertheless, perhaps

indeed for this very reason, at times undeniably effective. It would be difficult to find in the whole range of English fiction another writer of such uneven quality,—another writer whose best pages are separated from her worst by so wide a gap, whose strongest scenes are so vastly superior to her weakest, whose style at one time is so exceedingly good, and at others so exasperating to an ear that is sensitive to style. Mrs. Atherton, when at her best, is delightful in her ability to make us see; her picturings of old California, which forms the background of so large a part of what must be recognized as her best work, possess an artistic charm, a sensuous richness of color and at the same time a discreet self-restraint that constitute a delight to the ear and to the mental vision. Mrs. Atherton, at her worst, lets her pen run riot in a blare of words until the printed paragraph shrills onward and upward into a painful and hysterical shriek. Contrast, for instance, the following brief paragraphs, taken almost at random from her earlier writings:

Carmel River sparkled peacefully beneath its moving willows. The blue bay murmured to the white sands with the peace of evening. Close to the little beach, the old Mission hung its dilapidated head. Through its yawning arches, dark objects flitted; mold was on the yellow walls; from yawning crevice,

the rank grass grew. Only the tower still defied elements and vandals, although the wind whistled through its gaping windows and the silver bells were no more. The huts about the church had collapsed like old muscles, but in their ruin still whispered the story of the past.

And in sharp contrast with the art of a delicate vignette, like the above, compare such a riot of words and thought as the following:

As she reached the sidewalk, a squall caught and nearly carried her off her feet. . . . She cursed aloud. She let fly all the maledictions, English and Spanish, of which she had knowledge. She raised her voice and pierced the gale, the furious energy of her words hissing like escaping steam. She raised her voice still higher and shrieked her profane arraignment of all things mundane in a final ecstasy of nervous abandonment.

It is this tendency to vociferate a little too shrilly, this inability to sustain the key, that suddenly has the effect of letting a whole scene drop from grim reality into something akin to melodrama. In spite of this, Mrs. Atherton compels admiration for her unwavering independence, her splendid strength when she is at her best, and for the rich glow and passion of pulsing life that

she injects into the printed page, and that she undoubtedly would fall short of attaining with a less rugged and better disciplined style.

A brief analysis of certain representative volumes will make clearer the scope and the limitations of Mrs. Atherton's attainments. To discuss in detail every one of the score of volumes which she has put forth during nearly as many years would not only be impracticable but would seriously blur the resulting impression. But if we select, let us say, such volumes as *The Californians, Patience Sparhawk, Senator North, Rulers of Kings* and *Ancestors,* we shall have an easily manageable group that admirably shows her range of power, her chief interests in the problems of modern social life, as well as her methods and her errors of technique. Of Mrs. Atherton as a short-story writer there seems no need to speak specifically. *The Splendid Idle Forties* with its kaleidoscopic pictures of the life of old California, a life already vanishing into the realm of forgotten things, has a quality that refuses to be disregarded,—a quality of exotic beauty, an illusive fragrance, a strange mingling of pride and passion and languor. Yet the most that can be said of it is that it shows more of promise than of fulfilment, and that the best that it contains is to be met with again, worked out with a surer touch, in her longer California novels.

It is a little rash, in the case of a novelist whose interests in life are so broad as Mrs. Atherton's, and whose point of view is so cosmopolitan, to attempt to find some unifying principle, some common keynote serving to harmonize her work as a whole. And yet, in Mrs. Atherton's case, such an attempt may be made, with less danger, than in the case of many of her contemporaries, of being accused of a far-fetched, artificial interpretation. No one can read her books without being aware of the keen interest she has always taken in the spread of the modern democratic movement, in our political, social and moral attitude toward life. And still more keenly is she concerned with the inevitable conflict constantly in progress between this younger, stronger democratic movement and the inherited prejudices of an older, aristocratic conservatism. Most of all, she has chosen, again and again, with many minor variations, to study the struggle of a young woman striving to readjust herself to the new order of things, trying to conquer her own heredity, to put aside the conventions in which she has been nurtured, and to live her own life in independence and liberty. This is the dominant note of *Senator North*, in which Betty Madison's long fight for happiness is the direct outcome of rebelling against the traditions of her family, the iron-bound prejudices of her mother. Numbering themselves among the oldest and most exclusive

families in Washington, they have made it their boast that no politician has ever been received within their doors. Betty, in the prime of splendid young womanhood, overrules her mother's wishes, seeks the acquaintance of Representatives and Senators, frequents the gallery of the Senate Chamber, establishes a salon in which politics is the prevailing topic,—and, to the destruction of her peace of mind, falls in love with Senator North, realizing only too late that she has given her heart to a man already married.

The same note, although not quite so insistent, makes itself heard in *The Californians*. Magdalena Yorba is the daughter of a Spanish father and a New England mother. She is perpetually at war with herself, constantly suffering from the clash between Spanish pride and New England conscience; between passive acceptance of that obedience to convention which the women of her father's house had always shown, and that inborn sense of the individual right to live one's own life in one's own way, which came to her through generations of Puritan blood. The particular way in which she asserts this independence seems not especially momentous in itself, nor even vital to the structure of the story, but it serves to keep before us her ineffectual spirit of revolt. Magdalena, unlike the other girls of her social class, has a restless brain, thirsting for knowledge and

for an opportunity to achieve and to create. Her secret ambition is to become an author. But to Don Roberto Yorba, for a daughter of his house to essay to write is in itself an offense, while to publish a book and allow her name to appear in print would be shame unspeakable. The main theme of the story is only loosely connected with that of the girl's secret longing for a novelist's fame; but it does have to do very distinctly with the repressed conditions under which Magdalena has matured—conditions that have handicapped her for the inevitable social game, and make it possible for another girl, reared in greater freedom, to intervene and rob her of the man she loves.

Patience Sparhawk fits in less well to the prevailing scheme of Mrs. Atherton's books. But at least it is the story of a young woman's struggle against heredity, against the evil impulses bequeathed her by her mother, the degradation of her mother's memory. And in the later development of the book we get, to some extent, the clash between the exclusive class and the democracy, when Patience Sparhawk, wrongly accused of the murder of her husband, fights a losing battle for her life in court, in the public press, and even at the hands of the State Governor,—partly because the evidence looks black against her, but also, as Mrs. Atherton makes us feel, because she is an

aristocrat suffering judgment at the hands of the masses.

Rulers of Kings and *Ancestors*, among Mrs. Atherton's later volumes, are two books which it is most enlightening and salutary to study side by side, for they reveal her respectively at her worst and at her best. *Rulers of Kings* is a preposterous book, a book of *opéras-bouffes* pure and simple, a book of genius seemingly gone mad and running amuck through the palaces of Europe, ruthlessly trampling on the divine rights of kings and caricaturing the reigning monarchs in the spirit of a Sunday supplement cartoonist. It is distinctly depressing to have been under the necessity of reading so bad a book. And what makes it not merely depressing, but irritating as well, is the conviction that Mrs. Atherton is perfectly well aware of what she has done; and that she has done it deliberately, after much careful thought. For the benefit of readers who may not happen to have read *Rulers of Kings*, it may be worth while very briefly to state the sum and substance of it. The book opens with the following paragraph:

When Fessenden Abbott heard that he was to inherit four hundred million dollars, he experienced the profoundest discouragement he was ever to know, except on that midnight ten years later when he stood

on a moonlit balcony in Hungary, alone with the daughter of an emperor, and opened his contemptuous American mind to the deeper problems of Europe.

A man equipped with a contemptuous American mind and four hundred million dollars may be relied upon to make some stir in the world. Fessenden Abbott's special way of getting into mischief is to fall in love with an Austrian princess, a daughter of the Emperor Franz-Joseph, Renata by name, whom you will search for in vain in the *Almanach de Gotha*, for the simple reason that Mrs. Atherton invented her for the occasion. Now, if there is one court in Europe that is, more than any other, a stronghold of the divine right of kings, it is that of the Hapsburgs, the one court where the marriage of a princess with an American is not merely a thing forbidden, but simply unthinkable, inconceivable, impossible. It is true that just once in the world's history a commoner did precisely this impossible, inconceivable thing, a dauntless firebrand of a man from Corsica. Had Napoleon never really lived, and had some audacious novelist of the Dumas type invented him, conceived his fantastic career, his juggernaut progress over the fallen thrones of Europe, then by rights we might have had a novel entitled to call itself *Rulers of Kings*. But Fessenden Abbott, with his contemptuous American mind, is

sadly out of his element. When we listen to his stolen interviews with Renata, we wonder whether he is not a petty clerk who has taken his employer's daughter for a Sunday outing to Coney Island. Frankly, princesses do not talk that way. What happens in Mrs. Atherton's story is this: Fessenden Abbott possesses the rights to an invention which makes future warfare an impossibility. It is an explosive which starts in motion deadly whirlwinds that simply sweep out of existence any armed force venturing to stand in the way. Fessenden will sell his invention to Germany and Austria, in exchange for Franz-Joseph's daughter. Then, as he points out, these two powers can declare war upon Russia and the East, and wipe them out of existence. But if his offer is refused, he will instead sell the invention to Russia and, to quote his ultimatum to Franz-Joseph, "when Austria is a province of Russia, your daughter will be the first prisoner set free." The Emperor's face turns purple and his "heavy Hapsburg mouth" trembles—but he capitulates and his daughter marries the American, with the paternal blessing.

The only point of spending so much space upon this literary blunder is to show that here, as elsewhere, Mrs. Atherton has the obsession of a triumphant democracy, riding rough-shod over Europe's proudest aristocrats. In contrast to this,

it is like a breath of ozone to turn to *Ancestors*, in which the same general theme is treated not merely with sanity, but with a bigness, a comprehension, a convincing force that make it easily the most important contribution she has yet made to American fiction. It is not surprising that she has put into it so much of her best work. She is writing, not fantastic melodrama about comic-opera kings, but plain truth about real people whom she may have known personally. She is showing, sanely and convincingly, the manner in which certain almost forgotten strains of heredity will come to the surface and assert their right to a share in working out our destiny; and, lastly, she is picturing how the magic glamor of California may react upon a conservative Englishman, and little by little make a new man of him, until he ends by proving himself a better American than the Californians themselves. It is a big book undeniably, a book of almost epic sweep, a book whose power and value are likely in a measure to be missed, if we do not realize that the protagonist is not Jack Gwynne, the Americanized Englishman, nor Isabel Otis, the California girl who wins his love,—but the city of San Francisco which dominates the book like a regal and capricious heroine, and whose hour of agony by earthquake and by fire closes the volume with the shadow of a cosmic tragedy.

Nevertheless, even *Ancestors* is faulty in technique. Mrs. Atherton was on the right track, as she had been many times before. San Francisco, the gateway of the West, the big and splendid symbol of American liberty, dominating the whole volume; and against this spectacular background, a little group of individual lives, handicapped by a complex heredity, slowly and bravely working their way to freedom and to happiness,—why, the book is built on a plan of Zolaesque magnitude and boldness. The trouble is that the two themes, the general and the specific, are not closely enough correlated; that many of the episodes which take place in San Francisco might just as well have been enacted elsewhere; and that even the tremendous final chapter, picturing the devastation of the great earthquake, is not a structural necessity, not a solution of any problem, nor a rounding out of the specific human story. The latter has been amply solved in an earlier chapter; and the earthquake is merely like the last piece played by the orchestra after the curtain has been rung down and the audience is filing out.

One more example of what may be called slovenly technique is to be noted in one of the books already discussed, *Senator North*. Apparently, Mrs. Atherton had in mind in this case also a volume of epic breadth, with Washington and the whole scheme of national politics as the big,

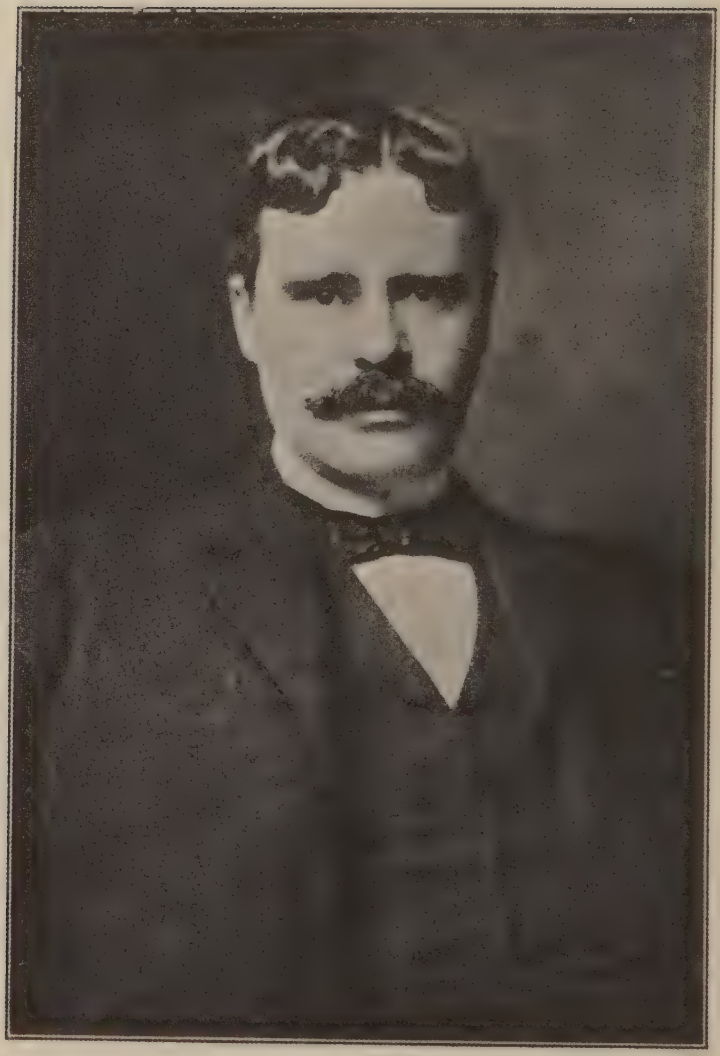
dominant general theme, and the love of an ardent young woman for one of the nation's lawmakers as the specific and individual point of interest. But here again the relation between the two themes is too loosely knit. We hear a good deal about political life; we frequent the houses of Congress, the homes of diplomats, the motley gatherings of public functions. But, after all, the specific human interest of the book, the old, old story of a woman bravely fighting against her love for a married man, is independent of the political background, independent of party lines, independent even of the Cuban War, with which the book concludes. As a story of two human lives, it would have been essentially the same, had the setting been laid in No-man's Land, outside of time and space.

There is, however, one subordinate story interwoven in *Senator North*, which, if it could have been made into a book apart, would have been an almost flawless bit of technique. This is the story of Betty Madison's half-sister Harriet, the illegitimate daughter of her father and an octoroon. Harriet is practically a white woman but for a scarcely perceptible blueness at the base of her finger-nails. The secret of her birth is well kept, and eventually she marries Betty's cousin, a Southerner full of the pride of blood and race. The secret might have come out in any one of a dozen

ways, but the way in which it does come out is structurally perfect. White though she is, Harriet inherits certain strains of negro temperament, among others the sort of religious fervor that finds vent in revival meetings, loud hallelujahs and gospel songs. And one night, when she returns from a negro camp-meeting almost in a religious trance, she hysterically confesses to her husband the truth about the one-sixteenth strain of colored blood, too hysterical to foresee that he will inevitably kill himself and that her own suicide is the logical sequel. This character of Harriet is perhaps the best bit of feminine analysis that Mrs. Atherton ever did; and it is a pity that it is buried away in a volume where its importance is unfairly overshadowed by far less vital episodes.

And now, briefly, what is Mrs. Atherton's place among the novelists of her time and generation? That she is a vital, living force cannot be denied. That she has won and holds her public is also unquestionable. Much that she has done is well deserving of the recognition it has received. On the other hand, there is much in her writings that is indefensible. It is well, however, for the world of letters as a whole, in a generation when form and technique are in danger of being raised up as a fetich, to have now and then a fearless and untrammeled spirit, refusing to be bound by other laws and conventions than those of her own mak-

ing,—especially when she justifies herself from time to time by the sheer strength, the rugged sincerity of such books as *The Californians* and *Ancestors*. It is no bad thing for a nation's literature to be stirred now and again by the sort of intellectual anarchy that is represented by Mrs. Atherton at her best.



OWEN WISTER

OWEN WISTER

No matter how willingly we may obey Candide's wise injunction to cultivate our garden, it is well to remember that not every writer can achieve an equal profusion and variety, nor an equal clearness of plan and purpose. Not to every one is it given to grow oranges and lemons, citrons and pistachios in oriental opulence. There are some literary gardens that bring with them an old-time fragrance of mignonette and sweet alyssum, with sunflowers and hollyhocks in the background; others again may be only an humble Cabbage Patch, or perhaps a Garden of Allah, all burning sand and sunshine,—but born of a singleness of purpose, distinct and unmistakable. But how, at first sight, is one to interpret a garden composed of much sagebrush, one towering redwood, a magnolia and a head of Boston lettuce? Yet this, in all courtesy be it said, is a fair inventory of the harvest which up to the present time has rewarded Mr. Wister's tillage in the fertile soil of his imagination. His short stories of Western ranch life, ranging from Arizona to Wyoming and comprising practically all his

early work and an ample share of his later, are literally as redolent of the soil, as unmistakably indigenous, in color, form and atmosphere, as is the gray-green aromatic herbage that forms so conspicuous a feature of their setting. His one full-length novel, *The Virginian*, has a certain primal bigness about it that makes it seem to loom up, tree-like, in rugged dignity, a growth of nature rather than of art. *Lady Baltimore* has by contrast a sort of hot-house charm; that southern softness of manners and of speech, as unmistakable and as delightful in their way as the form and fragrance of a magnolia bloom. And even Boston lettuce has not a flavor more local, a more unsuspected generosity of close-packed and succulent substance than that blithe little satire of college life, *Philosophy Four*, with its unpretentious outward showing, and the golden wisdom hidden at its heart.

Yet it is precisely the informality of Mr. Wister's garden, the absence of neat paths and close clipped hedge-rows, that gives the first important clue to his literary methods. The simple fact is that Mr. Wister has never attempted to pre-empt any special corner of the habitable world and make it his own, in any such sense as Mrs. Wilkins-Freeman pre-empted New England, Mr. Allen, Kentucky, or Mr. Cable, New Orleans. The fact that he has become identified in the popu-

lar mind with certain sections of the West is due less to his interest in the life of the plains as something curious and anomalous, something different from humanity as we ordinarily understand it, than to his recognition of the far more important fact that underneath the picturesque and striking surface differences, human nature west and east is at heart a fairly constant quantity. His obvious love for the characters of his own creating, Scipio Lemoyne and Steve and The Virginian, is not because they were cowboys, with a strange dialect and a still stranger moral code, but because, when one came to know them, one found them men, acting as the best of us might act if exposed to like conditions. In this connection, it is a significant fact that Mr. Wister almost always writes frankly as an outsider, bringing himself into the story after the method of Mr. Kipling's earlier tales, and writing in the first person as the one who has witnessed certain events or to whom certain others were repeated at first hand. The result of this method is that we are all the time forced to see and measure whatever is local and transitory through alien eyes, and that we think of such a book as *The Virginian*, not as the record of a phase of life that has already passed away, but as a vital and enduring presentment of types and characters that are most thoroughly, most widely, most delightfully American.

After conceding freely and gladly these merits to Mr. Wister, it will not be thought ungenerous to proceed to point out some of his shortcomings and to say at once frankly that he is one of those story tellers who have won fame not because of their craftsmanship, but in spite of their lack of it. To the fundamental doctrine of economy of means he shows a blithe indifference; in his long stories and his shorter ones alike, he refuses to trim his hedges or to prune back his vines, preferring to let them luxuriate, weed-like, in whatsoever direction they list. To some extent it is a handicap for an author to have a too facile charm of style. The writer who is conscious that, if he allows himself to become garrulous, if he strays a hair's-breadth beyond the strict letter of his theme, he will be voted a bore, learns at an early stage the fine art of suppression, which Emerson once declared to be the supreme quality of a literary style. But the genial narrator who is assured of his hold upon his audience, even when he rambles far afield, with many a digression, many a "this reminds me," is not likely to hamper himself with a rigid technique, and thereby lose the chance of drawing forth an additional laugh, or winning an extra round of applause. This ability to digress with impunity Mr. Wister has to an unusual extent; even through the medium of the printed page, one is always conscious

of a pleasing personality, and can almost see the indulgent smile or the amused twinkle of the eye that must accompany certain characteristic flashes of humor. For there can be no question that, besides being a story teller, the creator of "Emly" and the "Frawg's legs" episode must be numbered among our recognized American humorists,—and what is more, enrolled as one who has never, for the sake of scoring a point, degraded humor to the level of farce comedy.

Now, since an author is known by the company that he keeps upon his bookshelves, or at least by that smaller group which he considers worthy of emulation, it is worth while to pause for a moment over Mr. Wister's own confessions, in the preface to his latest published volume, *Members of the Family*. He tells us, for instance, that so far back as 1884 Mr. Howells had "felt his literary pulse and pronounced it promising"; that "a quickening came from the pages of Stevenson," and "a far stronger shove next from the genius of *Plain Tales from the Hills*"; and, oddly enough, that "the final push happened to be given by Prosper Mérimée." All of these influences, with the exception of the last mentioned, are of course obvious enough to any clear-eyed critic; but it is interesting to know that they were influences of the conscious sort, and that Mr. Wis-

ter frankly recognizes his indebtedness. The influence of Mérimée, however, is one that we might have been a long time in discovering, without this direct acknowledgment. Yet the connection is sufficiently easy to perceive, when once attention has been directed to it: Mérimée, like Wister, found his interest aroused and his imagination stimulated chiefly by new and foreign environments,—as in his best-known stories, *Colomba*, *Carmen*, *La Vénus d'Ille*,—wherein he could study, without criticising, the manner in which the fundamental problems of human nature work themselves out under the special limitations of Corsican or Spanish manners and customs. But his list of acknowledgments is not yet complete; there is one more to whom he professes a debt of gratitude, namely, Henry James,—and the heart-felt tribute that he proceeds to pay to the author of *The Ambassadors* is the best proof that, whatever his own shortcomings in technique may be, Mr. Wister's instinctive recognition of a master craftsman is beyond reproach. His own words in this connection deserve not only to be quoted but cordially indorsed, because if more of our young novelists to-day had even a rudimentary idea of the amount that Henry James might teach them, American fiction would be less conspicuous for its prolificness and more conspicuous for its finer and higher standards. The influence is, as

he points out, already at work, and slowly but surely it is bound to spread:

> It is significant to note how this master seems to be teaching a numerous young generation. Often do I pick up some popular magazine and read a story (one even of murder, it may be, in tropic seas or city slums), where some canny bit of foreshortening, of presentation, reveals the spreading influence, and I say, "Ah, my friend, never would you have found out how to do that if Henry James hadn't set you thinking!"

But in authorship, for every one influence of which we are conscious, there are a dozen that work unguessed, unsuspected. And in Mr. Wister's case, had his acquaintance with modern fiction been limited solely to those authors to whom he pays tribute, a work like *The Virginian*, with all its faults, would be inconceivable. What the other influences have been, it is needless here to conjecture, for the sufficient and practical reason that his own admissions prove him to be of widely catholic tastes, as free from attachment to any particular school as, let us say, was Marion Crawford. Howells, the veteran champion of realism; James, the subtlest of English psychologues; Stevenson, the belated romanticist, all find equal favor in his sight, not because of what they profess, but because he realizes that each of

them achieves quite admirably the special thing that he has undertaken to do. In other words, Mr. Wister is an eclectic both in his theories and his practice of fiction. It is impossible to pronounce him realist or romanticist, symbolist or psychologue. His methods vary, not only from book to book, but from chapter to chapter in the same book. Maupassant, for instance, might have written more than one episode in *The Virginian*,—the lynching of the cattle-thieves, for instance, or that other even more cruel chapter in which a human fiend avenges himself upon a horse driven beyond its strength, by gouging out its eye. But none but a dreamer could have written the idyl of Molly's marriage to the Virginian, and the honeymoon on the sylvan island, the only fault of which is that it was all too beautiful to be quite true.

Having acquired this initial perspective of Mr. Wister's literary theory and practice, as a whole, we may now profitably take up the separate works in detail, according to the division suggested by our opening symbolism of the garden. And first of all, as to the Sagebrush portion of his work, the stories of rather uneven merit, ranging all the way from mediocre to extremely good, that made up the contents of such early volumes as *Red Men and White* and *The Jimmyjohn Boss:*—well, to be quite candid, a detailed analysis of them would add nothing of real value to a critical estimate of

their author, because they are in a measure apprentice work. They were written while Mr. Wister was, in the phrase of the Literary Shop, learning his job. Had he never done anything better, "The Jimmyjohn Boss,"—the opening story in the volume of that name,—narrating how a cowboy, whose sole education has been acquired in the school of adversity, and whose chief asset is an indomitable nerve, is made foreman of the most lawless and undisciplined set of ruffians on any ranch in the State, takes them firmly in hand, and even after a temporary rebellion when they are crazed with drink, succeeds in getting back control and making himself undisputed master,—all this, and a dozen other tales, would have merited a certain amount of critical praise. But, as it happens, they were merely an earnest of something far better yet to come. And in due time that something better came in the form of *The Virginian*, which in its genesis is nothing more nor less than an accretion of short stories,—just as Maupassant's first novel, *Une Vie*, is an assemblage of short stories,—and with the additional point of resemblance, that in both cases a number of the stories have been published separately; in the case of *The Virginian*, several chapters having appeared in advance in magazine form; in that of *Une Vie*, the short stories being printed much later in a posthumous volume. The only practical pur-

pose for recalling here what must be a rather widely-known fact is that it serves to prove that Mr. Wister belongs to that class of story tellers whose natural form is the short story rather than the long,—who see every story, in the first instance, as a single detached incident; and when they attempt a more sustained effort, find themselves simply stringing together a series of such incidents, upon just one rather slender narrative thread. As it happens, *The Virginian* proved itself, in defiance of mathematics, to be considerably bigger than the sum of its parts. But that, I think, was due less to a definite, carefully worked out plan than to a chance unity of ideas running through all the several segments. The West, as a broad, free, stupendous whole, had impressed Mr. Wister mightily, and in a way that could not be quickly formulated or easily put into words; but with each story, each episode, he came nearer to saying some part of what was struggling for utterance. And when all these separate parts were finally fitted together into a single volume, it would be interesting to know whether Mr. Wister himself was not just a trifle surprised to find how well he had succeeded in expressing a number of rather important truths.

If it were not for the danger of being misunderstood as praising *The Virginian* for qualities which it does not possess, the simplest way of

defining its character and at the same time explaining why its very looseness of construction in some degree is a help rather than a hindrance, would be to say that it was of the epic type. But the term would have to be understood in a far more elemental sense than when applied to the careful, almost architectural symmetry of the Zolaesque method. *The Virginian* is epic, in so far as it shows us certain individual lives struggling to reach a solution of problems equally vital to the length and breadth of the whole vast region in which they live; a small group of human beings trying to justify to themselves and the world at large the fundamental justice of the rude moral code that governs them. In a stricter sense of the word, *The Virginian* is not merely badly constructed,—it is almost without structure. There is not a chapter in it that we would willingly spare: but that does not alter the fact that, aside from a few crucial scenes, there is scarcely a chapter whose excision would destroy the book's essential unity. In other words, the book is so far of the *picaresco* type that its episodes are like so many pearls on a single thread,—undoubted gems of their kind, but so arranged that the removal of one or more would not leave a gap in the design. *The Virginian* has actually that lack of deliberate detail work for which so many critics wrongfully censure Mr. Kipling's *Kim*. Yet if

we are willing to think for a moment of the West, that glorious, virgin West of earlier years, as a sort of anthropomorphized heroine, just as we think of India as the heroine of *Kim*,—then it becomes possible to forgive much of the looseness, the apparent irrelevancy, the digressions, because much that is either superfluous or beside the mark, so far as it is meant to help us understand the individual lives of Mollie or the Virginian, Steve or Trampas, becomes fraught with a new import when our interest is focused on the destiny of a community, almost on a nation.

This bigger view of *The Virginian* is of course the true one. The individual life of any one cowpuncher, of no matter how much instinctive and inborn honesty and courage and deference to women, is not for its own sake alone material fine enough or strong enough from which to fashion a novel that could have taken the firm hold upon the general public, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, that *The Virginian* indisputably has taken. However lovable Mr. Wister's rough diamond of the ranches may be, and however sympathetically romantic his courtship of the demure little schoolteacher with a New England conscience, these ingredients alone would not have kept the book alive throughout the first six months. The secret of its enduring hold upon the public must be sought in something deeper and more vital.

We find the answer, I think, in the broad, general principle, expressed here and there in words, and throughout the book by implication, that in every community men must make such laws for themselves as the conditions under which they live demand. The trick of "getting the drop" on your adversary, the right to shoot an enemy at sight after a fair warning, the whole underlying theory of vigilance committees and of lynch law, are justified only by the exigencies of special conditions, the advantage of the crudest and most rudimentary form of justice over no justice at all. Mr. Wister has not the least intention of holding lawlessness up for our admiration, just because it comes in picturesque masquerade. When the Virginian co-operates in a murder, according to our Eastern standards, by helping to lynch his personal friend, Steve; and when again he puts himself upon a level with a skulking outlaw like Trampas, accepts his challenge to shoot at sight, and succeeds in shooting straighter, Mr. Wister is not proclaiming the frontier code of Wyoming to have been superior to the English common law. He is simply insisting that if you or I are going to live in a community, we must accept the ethics of that community if we wish to be respected. He is exalting the hackneyed proverb about doing in Rome as the Romans do, from mere expediency, a mere courteous wish to do the expected thing, into

a big fundamental principle of human rights and duties. And when Mollie's New England conscience "capitulates to love," and when, after swearing she will never forgive the Virginian if he kills Trampas, she exclaims "Thank God!" at the sight of Trampas's dead body, Mr. Wister is not to be misunderstood as claiming that Molly's moral nature has undergone a change, and that if she returned to her New England home, she would take with her a strain of newly acquired lawlessness. What he does teach is that she has acquired a wider horizon, a broader view of life; that she has suddenly been made to see that right and wrong are sometimes relative terms, and that what is a penal offense in Massachusetts may be the truest heroism among the Rockies.

This same broad principle, that every community, whether large or small, rude or cultured, knows better than any outsider can know its own interests and necessities, forms the corner-stone of Mr. Wister's best short story, *Philosophy Four*. And partly because it is his best short story; partly because it is replete with a far-sighted wisdom; partly also because it is in a class by itself, unique and inimitable, it has seemed worth while to give it in the present analysis of Mr. Wister's writings an amount of space that to some readers may seem out of proportion to its size and scope.

There are many worthy persons who cherish the delusion that the percentages marked by solemn professors upon examination books are a fair criterion of the practical good which a student is obtaining from his college course, and that his precise standing in the graduating class is a reliable gauge of his future chances of success or failure. They are not aware that they are judging life from the standpoint of that venerable but somewhat misleading fable of "The Hare and the Tortoise"; and because some human hares have loitered by the wayside, and some human tortoises, dull, plodding and industrious, have come in ahead, they take the result as a measure of relative speed throughout life. The undergraduate world makes no such blunders,—and Mr. Wister, always felicitous in his subtle understanding of worlds and environments to which he bears the relation of an outsider, was never more delightfully, more triumphantly successful than in this *tour de force* in which he bridged the years that separated him from his own Harvard days, and reflected the spirit of the time and place as only a Harvard man of the early eighties could have known and felt it. But it would not be fair to imply that the merit of *Philosophy Four* is mainly local or temporal. In all the larger universities there are in every class certain students who are recognized as born leaders. In class politics, in

athletics, in college journalism, in all that gives undergraduate life cohesion and unity, they come to the front. In the older New England universities they belong largely to the number of those whose fathers and grandfathers before them were prominent in the social life of their respective classes, and whose family names figure prominently in the pages of early American history. To such as these, a four years' course at Yale or Harvard is enveloped in a maze of traditions undreamed of by the stranger and the alien. The University is not merely a seat of learning from which the maximum of knowledge must be extracted at a definite rate per day; it is a miniature world in which they are to find their level, just as they must find it later in the bigger world,—and they are quite as much interested in finding out what their fellow classmates think of them as they are in winning the approval of the dean and faculty. And in the long run, the verdict of the undergraduate world is not greatly at variance with the later verdict of the world at large.

In other words, *Philosophy Four*, in spite of its joyously irresponsible mood, emphatically points a moral,—although, it may be, in a somewhat topsy-turvy manner. And incidentally, it reflects undergraduate life with such fidelity that no Harvard man of twenty-five years' standing can read it without experiencing successive waves of

nostalgia. With the opening sentence, it projects us at once into the sultry atmosphere of examination week, with all its unforgotten sights and sounds and odors,—the fragrance of early June flowers wafted in at the windows, the lazy droning of ponderous beetles, blundering into the students' lamps, the distant singing of the Glee Club borne in from the steps of a dormitory across the Yard. Within the room two anxious, perspiring students, Bertie and Billy, are being prepared for an imminent examination in Philosophy Four, by a fellow classmate, whose name alone is a fairly sufficient characterization of race and attributes, Oscar Maironi,—at the exorbitant sum of five dollars an hour. Bertie and Billy are of the type of the Grasshopper, in La Fontaine's familiar fable; throughout the season of plenty they have played and sung, oblivious of fate approaching in the form of the Greek philosophers; but suddenly the very names of Aristotle and Plato, Epicharmos of Cos, send cold chills down their backs, and they hastily seek out Maironi, the human Ant, and pre-empt a share of his stored-up knowledge.

Now Maironi is a type of student that will be readily recognized. He is of the tortoise type, patient, plodding, bound ultimately to attain his goal, because a certain number of steps make a furlong, and a definite number of furlongs make a mile. His retentive memory absorbs the

words of professorial wisdom, after the fashion of a sponge; and when examination day comes, sponge-like, he will squeeze it back again, somewhat muddier and somewhat more scanty than when he received it, yet essentially the same and without an added drop of originality. Over the two irresponsible spirits, Billy and Bertie, Oscar labors faithfully, sadly bewildered and somewhat pained by their lack of reverence for the sages of antiquity, understanding only vaguely the rapid fire of their chaff and their slang, but allowing himself no protest beyond a mildly sarcastic reference to their "original research." By seven o'clock on Monday evening they have "salted down the early Greek bucks"; by midnight they have "called the turn on Plato"; Tuesday night brings them down to the Multiplicity of the Ego. The examination is set for Thursday. Accordingly, Wednesday is dedicated to a general last survey of the whole subject. As it happens, Wednesday morning dawns bright and clear, a most alluring morning for a wild and irresponsible break for liberty. The open country beyond the Charles calls to them irresistibly. There is, besides, a sort of tradition, that somewhere in the direction of Quincy there is a wonderful old tavern, a mysterious, elusive, will-o'-the-wisp sort of place called the Bird-in-Hand, where marvelous dinners and still more fabulous wines could be ob-

tained, if only one could find the place. "Have you any sand?" Bertie inquires of Billy. "Sand!" Billy yells in response; and within twenty minutes they are driving rapidly in the direction of Quincy, leaving Oscar in the lurch. And at this point Mr. Wister subtly explains:

> You see, it was Oscar that had made them run so, or rather it was Duty and Fate walking in Oscar's displeasing likeness. Nothing easier, nothing more reasonable than to see the tutor and tell him that they should not need him to-day. But that would have spoiled everything. They did not know it, but deep in their childlike hearts was a delicious sense that in thus unaccountably disappearing they had won a great game, had got away ahead of Duty and Fate.

It was a wild and exhilarating day that Bertie and Billy spent in pursuit of the elusive Bird-in-Hand. They cooled themselves with a swim in the Charles; they lay on the bank and shouted at each other questions from Greek philosophy, turning it into a game by agreeing that each should credit himself with twenty-five cents whenever the other failed to answer correctly; and finally, when daylight was fading into dusk, they stumbled unexpectedly upon the long-sought tavern, thanks to the timely shying of their horse; enjoyed an opulent repast, in which "silver fizz" played a

conspicuous part; lost all conception of time and place, and drove homeward by the waning light of the moon in such an exhilarated condition that when Billy inadvertently tumbled out of the wagon over the wheel, he had barely energy enough remaining to inquire who had fallen, and when told, to add in plaintive cadence, "Did Billy fall out? Poor Billy!"

Now, by all the laws of probability a night like this should have paved the way for a first-class failure in Philosophy Four, but it did nothing of the sort. Oscar, who had spent the previous day in calling, with business-like punctuality, once an hour at their room and leaving memoranda to the effect that his services had been duly tendered, plodded through the three hours' examination with his wonted laborious fidelity,—and received a modest seventy-five per cent. as a reward for answering the Professor's questions in the Professor's own words. But Billy's mark was eighty-six, and Bertie's ninety; and they were both highly complimented by the Professor—Bertie for his discussion of the double personality and his apt illustration of the intoxicated hack driver who had fallen from his hack and inquired who had fallen, and then had pitied himself; and Billy for his striking and independent suggestions concerning the distortions of time and space which hashish and other drugs produce. But the crowning touch

of irony is attained in Oscar's unbounded astonishment, his inability to understand:

He hastened to the Professor with his tale. "There is no mistake," said the Professor. Oscar smiled with increased deference. "But," he urged, "I assure you, sir, those young men knew absolutely nothing. I was their tutor and they knew nothing at all. I taught them all their information myself." "In that case," replied the Professor, not pleased with Oscar's tale-bearing, "you must have given them more than you could spare. Good-morning."

Before proceeding to point out that *Lady Baltimore*, Mr. Wister's next volume in point of time, is in spite of all the obvious differences of subject, setting and workmanship, essentially the product of the same mind, the same philosophy, the same outlook upon life, it is necessary to clear up one or two possible misunderstandings regarding certain terms used in this chapter. There is, for instance, the statement that *The Virginian* is Mr. Wister's only sustained effort, his one full-length novel,—and to offset it is the indisputable fact that *Lady Baltimore* is issued in the conventional novel form, and contains upward of four hundred pages. Now to suggest that broad margins and large type are potent factors in lending a deceptive impression of amplitude is merely to quibble over non-essentials. The difference between

a short story and a novel lies deeper than a mere choice between eight- and ten-point type. *The Virginian*, curtailed and compressed into fifty pages, would still be a novel, because of the serious purpose and the tremendous human truths behind it. *Lady Baltimore*, regardless of mathematical dimensions, can never be in spirit anything more than an amplified novelette,—exquisite in workmanship, perennially charming in its presentment of an exotic and evanescent civilization, yet containing little in the way of broad generalities or of serious, practical philosophy. Nevertheless, there is the further important truth that technically *Lady Baltimore* is the most admirable artistry, the most nearly flawless piece of work that Mr. Wister has yet achieved.

Every conservative critic must deplore the rash extravagance of a certain type of reviewer who finds in the passing novel of to-day qualities worthy of comparison with Fielding and Thackeray, Balzac and Flaubert and Daudet. Even in Mr. Wister's case it is at least over-generous to pronounce him, within the limits of a single review, a worthy successor both of Meredith and of Henry James. Yet this is precisely what Mr. Edward Clark Marsh, a critic characterized equally by the modesty and the discernment of his judgment, has done, at least by implication, in a review of *Lady Baltimore*. A possible indebted-

ness to the author of *The Egoist* we may well let pass; considering how few novelists ever learn just where or how to begin or end a story, it is quite natural to attribute to the few who show intelligence in this respect a conscious imitation of one of the acknowledged masters. The influence of Henry James is a very different matter. In acknowledging his indebtedness to the author of *What Maisie Knew*, in the preface already quoted, Mr. Wister goes on to say that he once had the privilege of going over one of his own books with Mr. James, and of having the latter point out, page by page, his short-comings, his lost opportunities, his lack of that finished technique, without which no amount of native genius can reach artistic perfection. Mr. Wister does not state which of his volumes was thus criticised; but one does not feel much diffidence in venturing the conjecture that it was *The Virginian*, and that *Lady Baltimore* was Mr. Wister's prompt acknowledgment of his indebtedness, as well as a demonstration of his surprising aptness as a pupil. For this reason it is worth while to call attention to the critical acumen of Mr. Marsh's comment, anticipating as it did by five years Mr. Wister's confession:

> If there is a remote suggestion of Meredith in the elegant leisure of his beginning, there is a closer ref-

crence,—a conscious indebtedness, indeed, I believe—to Henry James in his manner, the turn of his phrases, and even in the framework and articulation of his story.

All this is perfectly true; and the extraordinary thing about it is that, while in everything excepting the sheer craftsmanship of writing Mr. Wister has followed his usual methods, there is nothing in the earlier volumes to show that Henry James ever before influenced him. In many respects, no doubt, their two minds must work in much the same manner, or Mr. Wister could never have found himself so quickly in sympathy with the veteran artist's technical methods; but, so far as the outsider can discover, their newly revealed kinship is a matter of those more obvious questions of plot construction, point of view, the grouping of paragraphs or the turn of a phrase. Accordingly, let us see first of all of what substance *Lady Baltimore* is made; and secondly, in what fashion and with what new manipulations Mr. Wister has chosen to mold that substance. As all readers of *The Virginian* are aware, its author has always insisted that although its pages contain no famous characters, and its date is so recent as to be practically contemporary, it is nevertheless a historical novel, a record of a certain phase of American history caught and preserved during

the actual making. In the same sense both *Philosophy Four* and *Lady Baltimore* are historical documents, representing eternal truths of human nature as reacted upon by transitory conditions. The setting of *Lady Baltimore* is a certain town of King's Port, a quiet backwater in the current of Southern social life, where old-time manners and customs still linger; and there is a fragrance of gentle dignity and bygone courtliness in the ordinary relations of life. Perhaps no story ever made claim to serious consideration while resting upon so fragile a foundation. *Lady Baltimore* is a local Southern name for a certain rare and glorified species of cake,—and the cake itself could not be of more airy and delicate consistence than the story it is here called upon to sustain. Imagine a Northerner plunged by certain whims of destiny, —the details are immaterial,—into this tranquil eddy of an alien civilization, of whose social code he is utterly ignorant; imagine him, while taking luncheon in the one available cake-and-tea room of the town, witnessing the purchase of a Lady Baltimore cake by a much embarrassed young man, who admits to the equally self-conscious young woman behind the counter that this cake, ordered for a day near at hand, is to serve at his wedding. In the embarrassment of the young man, the Northerner scents something unusual in the way of romance; and little by little he gleans the facts,

and pieces them together. The young man, it seems, has committed an act which his family and friends choose to regard as suicidal,—he has engaged himself to a young woman of whose pedigree they know little or nothing; she may be a very worthy girl, but she is not one of them, she does not belong to the Southern aristocracy, she is not a part and parcel of King's Port.

Such in brief is the opening situation of *Lady Baltimore*. To give an adequate idea of the way in which the unyielding, indomitable force of local prejudice is brought to bear upon this young couple; how gossip twists and distorts and plays havoc with the actualities of the case; and how a number of destinies are forced out of their natural channels by the dead inertia of traditional, social laws: would mean nothing less than to rewrite *Lady Baltimore*, and to spoil it in the rewriting. In *The Virginian*, Mr. Wister succeeded in giving us a thoroughly virile book without brutalizing it; in *Lady Baltimore*, he has achieved the harder task of producing a delightfully feminine book without stooping to effeminacy. Or, to put it in another way, he has juggled dexterously with soap-bubbles without breaking them in the process.

It remains to speak only of the technique of *Lady Baltimore*. It is no new thing to find Mr. Wister writing in the first person. But it is distinctly new to find him rigidly confining himself

to that narrow segment of life that passes directly within the angle of vision of his spokesman, the Northerner. This is the Henry James trick, *par excellence*. Earlier novelists have sometimes done the same thing indifferently well, by instinct rather than intention; but Mr. James was the first to reduce this method to rules. And the admirable consistency with which Mr. Wister has followed out this principle of a single viewpoint not only proves him to be an apt pupil but makes *Lady Baltimore* one of those rare achievements in American fiction, a piece of technique that is almost without a flaw.

It is a regrettable fact that Mr. Wister, never a prolific author, seems to be writing with an ever decreasing momentum. It is so long since a new volume has appeared, bearing his name, that there is a half-hearted effort to hail as a literary event the recent appearance of *Members of the Family*, in which he has gathered together the later stories of the West which from time to time he has contributed to the magazines. In all candor it must be admitted that the majority of them are rather light-weight. A few are frankly humorous, as, for instance, "Happy-Teeth," in which the easily aroused superstition of Indians is cleverly utilized to drive out a new post-trader who has acquired monopoly through unfair means; or again "In the Back," in which a hasty, although

perhaps well-merited kick, delivered by an army captain to one of his men, becomes the subject of serious investigation and infinite red tape, and is finally paid in full with accumulated interest. But the stories that deserve to be remembered are "Timberline" and "The Gift Horse." Imagine yourself a tenderfoot, unskilled in the ways of the West, and without the clues that would help you to read character. Imagine that you have done a kindness to a man who is locally eyed askance; and that he, to mark his gratitude, has insisted upon lending you a splendid specimen of a horse for the season. It might or it might not strike you as peculiar that before giving you the horse he should inquire so particularly as to your plans and get your definite statement that you will remain throughout the summer on a certain side of a certain mountain range. Imagine, furthermore, that you suddenly change your mind and cross that range in quest of a certain legendary spring which according to Indian tradition has a way of strangely appearing and disappearing. You find the spring and simultaneously find an inclosure wherein there are many horses, stolen horses with fresh brands not yet healed; at your very feet lie a pile of branding irons; and before you can collect your thoughts you are looking into the muzzle of a pistol, and find yourself surrounded by a company of ominously quiet men,

one of whom carries a coil of hempen rope. These men do not care to listen to explanations, they simply cite the significant fact that you are here, that the branding irons are here and that the horse you ride is a stolen one. Such is the awkward predicament narrated in "The Gift Horse," and there is a grim little touch at the end which completes its artistry. But even stronger than this is "Timberline." For sheer economy of means and a steady rise in dramatic force to the culminating tragedy, it stands as easily the best story in the collection, indeed one of the best that Mr. Wister has ever written. It is simply the account of a man, little more than a boy, who, having been the unintentional instrument of a murder, has accepted a bribe to remain silent, and slowly, inexorably, has found himself dragged back by conscience to the scene of the crime, forced under the spell of an extraordinary and awe-inspiring convulsion of nature to make confession, restore the money and by his spectacular death reveal the hiding-place of the other victim at the bottom of a cañon a thousand feet below. An old idea, elemental in its simplicity —but, like many of the world's big stories, owing its value to a finished workmanship, an unerring instinct for telling neither too much nor too little.

In his earlier work, as we have already seen, Mr. Wister cared little about the rules of form; his strength lay in his ability to hold the attention,

whether he shortened up a story or unduly prolonged it. In other words, he told his stories in a certain form, not because it was the best form, but because it happened for the moment to be his form, the form that came instinctively. The most interesting thing about this new volume is that it shows that he is continuing to practise, as he first learned to do in *Lady Baltimore*, a more careful, more conscious method of construction. Mr. Wister has possessed from the first the valuable assets of sincerity, force and broad, popular appeal. And above all he has always had something to say that was eminently worth the saying. Now that he has added to these qualities a finer artistry, it is to be hoped that his lessened productiveness is not due to an impoverished soil, but to a wise economy that deliberately lets land lie for a season fallow.

FRANK NORRIS

FRANK NORRIS

It is barely a decade since Frank Norris was putting the final touches to the volume which was destined to be his last novel, and clarifying his ideas upon literature and life in a series of essays entitled "Salt and Sincerity." There have been so many changes in American fiction during these intervening ten years; so many younger reputations have waxed and waned, that the work of Norris, taken as a whole, has been thrown into an unjust and misleading remoteness. We are apt to think of him as belonging to a bygone generation, as an influence which after showing a brief potentiality suddenly withered once and for all. As a matter of fact, Norris's influence has never for an hour been dead. In a quiet, persistent way, it has spread and strengthened, leavening all unsuspectedly the maturer work of many of the writers who have since come into prominence. And the best way in which to realize the nearness of Norris, in point of time and of spirit as well as the dormant strength which his early death prevented from ever fully awakening, is to glance back and briefly consider some of the conditions

of American fiction at the time when he began to write.

During the closing years of the nineteenth century, or to be more specific, from 1897 to 1902, the period of Norris's activity, there were easily a score of new writers who leaped suddenly into prominence on the strength of a single book. The volumes that come casually to mind and may be regarded as fairly representative are Winston Churchill's *Richard Carvel*, Robert Herrick's *Gospel of Freedom*, Mrs. Wharton's *The Greater Inclination*, Booth Tarkington's *Gentleman from Indiana*, Brand Whitlock's *Thirteenth District*, George Horton's *Long Straight Road*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Morgan Robertson's *Spun Yarn*, Harry Leon Wilson's *The Spenders*, Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, Jack London's *Son of the Wolf*,—the list might be stretched to twice the length. In glancing over this array of names, the various associations and contrasts they offer strike one to-day as exceedingly odd. Certain of these reputations seem now curiously stunted; certain others loom up unexpectedly large; but in spite of the unforeseen readjustments that time has wrought, the significant fact remains that Norris in his lifetime dwarfed them all. At the time of the appearance of *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, there was not a single volume produced by this younger group, with the possible

exception of *The Virginian*, that even approached them in breadth of view or bigness of intent. And when we measure the ten years' growth in individual cases, when we compare the promise of *The Gospel of Freedom* or *The Greater Inclination* with the accomplishment of *Together* or *The House of Mirth*, then the fact is suddenly forced home to us, how much greater growth that same ten years would have shown in the best craftsman and the bravest, biggest soul of them all. One realizes now that even in his last and maturest books, Norris had not fully found himself, that he was still in the transition period, still groping his way tirelessly, undauntedly towards self-knowledge. He had adopted the creed of naturalism ardently, refashioning it to suit the needs of a younger, cleaner civilization, a world of wider expanses, purer air, freer life. And even while he wrought, he witnessed the apparent downfall of that very creed in the land of its birth, saw its disintegration beneath the hands of its chief champion. It is impossible to read Norris's works without perceiving that from first to last there was within him an instinct continually at war with his chosen realistic methods; an unconquerable and exasperating vein of romanticism that led him frequently into palpable absurdities,—not because romanticism in itself is a literary crime, but because it has its own proper place in literature, and

that place is assuredly not in a realistic novel. How this inner warfare would eventually have worked out; what compromises, innovations, iconoclasms would have paved the way to full maturity of accomplishment, it is of course impossible now even to guess. But one thing is certain: Norris would have found that way; and when found, it would have proved not merely big, rugged, compelling, but also clean as the open, wind-swept spaces that he loved, and fine as gold that has no dross.

The expressed views of any novelist on the principles of his art have a value far out of proportion to their critical acumen. We may agree or not with Marion Crawford's *The Novel, What It Is*, or with Maupassant's preface to *Pierre et Jean*, with Zola's *Roman Expérimentale* or *The Art of Fiction*, by Henry James; their principles may be quite right or quite wrong; the important fact in each case is that they have betrayed to us the principles in accordance with which they themselves wrought. They have given us penetrating searchlights into the secrets of their methods, the sources of their strength and their weakness. This is why, in a critical examination of the writings of Frank Norris, his collected essays entitled *The Responsibilities of the Novelist* not only cannot be ignored but form the natural and obvious starting-point.

It is well to add quickly that these essays will serve merely as a starting-point and nothing more. If they were the measure of Norris's value, if they represented not only what Norris believed that he was trying to do but what he actually succeeded in doing, he would be of considerably lesser magnitude and his influence would have ended long before this. They are exceedingly uneven, some of them revealing a surprisingly deep and far-reaching understanding of the methods and purposes of serious fiction, while others again show nothing excepting certain curious personal limitations, a sort of mental astigmatism. In a number of them, such as "A Problem in Fiction," one feels that Norris was not so much telling the general public the views that he had long and clearly held, but rather that he was making interesting exploration trips into his own mind and trying by a *tour de force* to reconcile the contradictory instincts and impulses that he encountered there. It may be said in passing that these essays contain some curiously bad writing to come from the pen possessing the strength and brilliance and lyric quality of Norris at his best. It seems almost as though he were saying: This is not my real work; it is only a side issue. I cannot stop to worry about form and style. All I want to do is to convey the idea with sufficiently comprehensible journalistic fluency. I am in a

hurry to get back to my new big novel, the biggest and the best I have ever done! This was, quite literally, Norris's attitude towards fiction in general and his own in particular. The novel to him was the literary form of supreme importance, the most potent and far reaching:

> The Pulpit, the Press and the Novel—these indisputably are the great molders of public opinion and public morals to-day. But the Pulpit speaks but once a week; the Press is read with lightning haste and the morning news is waste paper by noon. But the novel goes into the home to stay. It is read word for word; is talked about, discussed; its influence penetrates every chink and corner of the family. . . . How necessary it becomes, then, for those who, by the simple art of writing, can invade the heart's heart of thousands, whose novels are received with such measureless earnestness—how necessary it becomes for those who wield such power to use it rightfully. Is it not expedient to act fairly? Is it not, in Heaven's name, essential that the People hear, not a lie, but the Truth?

Such was Norris's firm conviction regarding the modern novel: an instrument of vast and at times dangerous power; and the novelist's responsibility he looked upon as a solemn trust. He had only scorn for writers who shifted and spun around like weather-cocks to meet the wind of popular fa-

vor; and he insisted that the true reward of the novelist, the reward that could not be taken away from him, was to be able to say at the close of his life:

"I never truckled; I never took off the hat to Fashion and held it out for pennies. By God, I told them the truth. They liked it or they didn't like it. What had that to do with me? I told them the truth; I knew it for the truth then, and I know it for the truth now."

The essay on "The Novel with a Purpose" is the sanest, wisest, most important chapter in this volume. It shows how thoroughly Norris understood the principles of epic structure in fiction, how faithfully he had learned the one big lesson that Zola had to teach, and how wisely he had taken to heart the warning contained in the great Frenchman's later blunders. The novelist's purpose is to his story "what the keynote is to the sonata. Though the musician cannot exaggerate the importance of the keynote, yet the thing that interests him is the sonata itself." In like manner the purpose in a novel is important to the author only as a note to which his work must be attuned; "the moment that the writer becomes really and vitally interested in his purpose his novel fails." And Norris proceeds to illustrate "this strange

anomaly," by imagining Hardy writing a sort of English *Germinal,* setting forth the wrongs of the Welsh coal-miners. "It is conceivable that he could write a story that would make the blood boil with indignation. But he himself, if he is to remain an artist, if he is to write his novels successfully, will, as a novelist, care very little about the iniquitous labor system of the Welsh coal-miners. It will be to him as impersonal a thing as the key is to the composer of a sonata." Now all this is absolutely right; indeed, so simple and elemental an axiom of structure that one wonders why, at the close of the nineteenth century, it was still necessary to put it into words at all,—why it was that even the unthinking general reader could not feel instinctively the fatal inferiority of Mrs. Humphry Ward to Zola; the inferiority, for that matter, of all of the Frenchman's work subsequent to *Le Docteur Pascal* to almost all his work preceding it. Yet, as a matter of fact, even Norris himself did not perceive this truth in its fullness until after the appearance of *Fécondité.* He had not seen how far astray Zola had already drifted in *Paris;* he did not see that he himself, in *The Octopus,* was being drawn into the same disastrous current. But he did see later, in time to show in *The Pit* the dawn of a new light. And that is why the following quotation is not merely a reiteration of the point already made about

Hardy and the Welsh miners but has an interest all its own:

> Do you think that Mrs. Stowe was more interested in the slave question than she was in the writing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin?* Her book, her manuscript, the page-to-page progress of the narrative, were more absorbing to her than all the Negroes that were ever whipped or sold. Had it not been so, that great purpose-novel never would have succeeded.
>
> Consider the reverse—*Fécondité,* for instance. The purpose for which Zola wrote the book ran away with him. He really did care more for the depopulation of France than he did for his novel. Result—sermons on the fruitfulness of women, special pleading, a farrago of dry, dull incidents, overburdened and collapsing under the weight of a theme that should have intruded only indirectly.

It is rather painful to turn from the broad sanity of views like these, views that Norris arrived at through his intellect, to certain others that he reached through his emotions,—such, for instance, as his views upon romantic fiction. If we have ever had a writer in this country who owes every last atom of importance that is in him to the realistic creed, that writer is Frank Norris. And for that reason it sounds like the basest kind of ingratitude to find him speaking of "that harsh, loveless, colorless blunt tool called

realism." The plain truth is that Norris never understood in any of their accepted senses the meaning of the terms, romance and realism. At the time when *A Man's Woman* was still running serially in the San Francisco *Chronicle* and the New York *Evening Sun*, Norris said in a letter to a critic who had objected to his "exasperating vein of romanticism," "For my own part, I believe that the greatest realism is the greatest romanticism and I hope some day to prove it." In "A Plea for Romantic Fiction," he gave the following topsy-turvy, irrational, irresponsible definition:

> Romance, I take it, is the kind of fiction that takes cognizance of variations from the type of normal life. Realism is the kind of fiction that confines itself to the type of normal life. According to this definition, then, Romance may even treat of the sordid, the unlovely—as, for instance, the novels of M. Zola. Zola has been dubbed a Realist, but he is, on the contrary, the very head of the Romanticists.

Now Norris might just as well have defined White as that pigment which we use to paint the rare and precious things of life, and Black as that which we choose for all common every-day things, cups and saucers, table linen, wheel-barrows and cobble-stones. Shoe-polish, he might have added, is generally considered black but really it is the

most dazzling of all possible varieties of white. This sort of thing is definition run mad, arrant nonsense leading nowhere. There are several perfectly legitimate definitions of the two chief creeds in fiction, any one of which Norris might have adopted, any one of which would have been intelligible to the public at large. There is, for instance, that very simple distinction drawn by Marion Crawford, making realism a transcript of life as it is, and romance, of life as we would like it to be. But Norris is right in one thing: realism and romance do exist side by side everywhere and all the time. Where he missed the truth is in this: that the difference between the two is not one of material fact, of a different series of episodes, but simply of a different attitude of mind. Two people can look at a sunset, and one of them may say, "With what magic trickery has Nature's brush decked out the heavens with a new and marvelous color scheme!" And the other may with equal right reply, "The refraction of solar radiation through a finely attenuated aqueous vapor does produce some rather pretty effects." You have a perfect right to go into raptures over the infinite power of Creation which produced Niagara Falls; but the man who "didn't see what prevented the water from tumbling over" was equally within his rights,—and he was a pretty good realist. Water itself may be looked

at romantically as the god Neptune, or realistically as H_2O,—and if you cannot see that the chemical fact is the greater wonder of the two, then there is no use in trying to convert you.

Frank Norris was of the number of those whom it was hopeless to try to convert. He could not or would not understand that while a novelist has a perfect right to look upon life either literally or imaginatively he has not the right to do the two things simultaneously. There is a character presented almost at the outset of *The Octopus*, a poet by the name of Presley, who admirably illustrates the chief shortcoming of Norris's work. He is haunted by the dream of writing an Epic of the West. His ambition is to paint life frankly as he sees it; yet, incongruously enough, he wishes to see everything through a rose-tinted mist,—a mist that will tone down all the harsh outlines and crude colors of actuality. He is searching for true romance, and instead finds himself continually brought up against the materialism of railway tracks and grain elevators and unjust freight tariffs. All this is of interest to us, not because Presley is an especially important or convincing character, but because he is so obviously introduced as a means of stating once again the author's topsy-turvy theory that realism and romanticism are convertible terms; and that the epic theme for which Presley is vainly groping lies

all the time close at hand, could he only see it, not merely in the primeval life of mountain and of desert, the shimmering purple and gold of a sunset, but in the limitless stretch of steel rails, the thunder of passing trains, the whole, vast, intricate mechanism of organized monopoly.

Now, of course, there is an epic vastness and power in many phases of our complicated modern life; and the only possible way in which to handle them adequately is by using a huge stretch of canvas, and blocking them in with broad, sweeping, Zolaesque brush strokes. But epic vastness has no logical connection with romanticism; its very essence lies in some huge, all-pervading, symbolic figure, some personified Idea, seen vaguely in the background, behind a closely-woven web of human actualities. Here and there, it may be, the seeds of romance will take root and spring up, in spite of all precaution, like tares among the wheat,—and they are inevitable in the case of a writer who, like Norris, has a tender indulgence for the tares. This was his pet failing, his besetting sin,—a curious paradox when one stops to consider how wonderfully clear, the greater part of the time, his vision was. He knew in his inmost soul that what counts most in honest workmanship is fidelity to life, the real, actual life as it is lived day by day by average, commonplace human beings. "It still remains true," he once wrote, "that all the

temperament, all the sensitiveness to impressions, all the education in the world will not help one little, little bit in the writing of a novel if life itself, the crude, the raw, the vulgar, if you will, is not studied."

And in this respect he practised what he preached, studying the crude, the raw, the vulgar; doggedly adhering to the blunt truth, never softening or palliating a thought where he conceived it essential to the fidelity of his picture. Occasionally, his very imagery verged upon coarseness, as where he described the ships along the city's water-front, " their flanks opened, their cargoes, as it were, their entrails spewed out in a wild disarray of crate and bale and box." And what magic effects this fearlessness of words produced; how prodigiously Norris succeeded in making us see! There have been few novelists who could vie with him in the ability to sketch the physiognomy of some mean little side-street in San Francisco, to picture with a few telling strokes some odd little Chinese restaurant, to make us breathe the very atmosphere of McTeague's tawdry, disordered, creosote-laden dental parlor, or the foul, reeking interior of Bennett's tent on the icefields of the far North. And yet, every now and again, this same acute, clear-visioned writer would perversely sacrifice not only truth, but even verisimilitude for the sake of a

melodramatic stage effect, even at the risk of "an anti-climax, worthy of Dickens," as Mr. Howells has characterized the closing scene in *McTeague*. When a friend once expostulated with Norris for the gross improbability of that chapter in which a murderer, fleeing from justice into the burning heat of an alkali desert, carries with him a canary that continues to sing after thirty-six hours without food or water, he frankly admitted the absurdity, but said that he had been unable to resist the temptation, because the scene offered such a dramatic contrast. "Besides," he added whimsically, "I compromised by saying that the canary was half-dead, anyhow."

Norris's debt to Zola, already referred to, is too obvious to have need of argument. Everywhere, from his earliest writings to his last, in one form or another, it stares us in the face, compelling recognition. Like Zola, his strength lay in depicting life on a gigantic scale, portraying humanity in the mass; like Zola, he could not work without the big, underlying Idea, the dominant symbol. In *McTeague*, the symbol is Gold, the most fitting emblem he could devise to personify the State of California. The whole book is flooded with a shimmer of yellow light,—we see it in the floating golden disk that the sunlight, through the trees, casts upon the ground; in the huge gilded tooth of the dentist's sign; in the lot-

tery prize which Trina wins; in the Polish Jew, Zerkow, "the Man with the Rake, groping hourly in the muck heap of the city for gold, for gold, for gold"; in the visionary golden dishes of Maria Macapa's diseased fancy, "a yellow blaze like fire, like a sunset"; and again in the hoarded coins on which Trina delighted to stretch her naked limbs at night, in her strange passion for money, —the coins which finally lured McTeague and his enemy to their hideous death in the alkali desert. In the Epic of the Wheat, as we shall see more specifically when we come to examine *The Octopus* in detail, the central symbol had become an even vaster, more relentlessly dominant element. A single State no longer satisfied him. What he wanted was a symbol which should sum up at once American life and American prosperity. His friends are still fond of telling of the day when he came to his office trembling with excitement, incapacitated for work, his brain seething with a single thought, the Trilogy of the Wheat. "I have got a big idea, the biggest I ever had," was the burden of all he had to say for many a day thereafter.

Another obvious debt that Norris owed to the creator of *Les Rougon-Macquart* is his style: the swing and march of phrase and sentence; the exuberant wealth of noun and adjective; the insistent iteration with which he develops an idea, ex-

panding and elaborating and dwelling upon it, forcing it upon the reader with accumulated synonym and metaphor, driving it home with the dogged persistence of a trip-hammer. Here is a passage which, brief as it is, admirably illustrates this quality:

> Outside, the unleashed wind yelled incessantly, like a sabbath of witches, and spun about their pitiful shelter and went rioting past, leaping and somersaulting from rock to rock, tossing handfuls of dry, dust-like snow into the air; folly-stricken, insensate, an enormous, mad monster gamboling there in some hideous dance of death, capricious, headstrong, pitiless, as a famished wolf.

And again, in accordance not only with Zola but with the entire Continental school of realism, Norris delights in dwelling upon the physical side of life. With the exception of *The Pit*, the characters in his books are none of them possessed of an over-refinement of sentiment; they are normal beings with a healthy animality about them, rugged, rough-hewn men and dauntless self-sufficient women. He dealt by preference with primitive natures, dominated by single passions. His favorite heroes are cast in a giant mold, big of bone and strong of sinew, with square-cut heads and a salient, "prognathous" jaw. Such was

Captain Kitchell, in *Moran of the Lady Letty;* such also was McTeague:

> A young giant, carrying his huge shock of blond hair six feet three inches from the ground; moving his immense limbs, heavy with ropes of muscle, slowly, ponderously. His hands were enormous, red and covered with a fell of stiff, yellow hair. His head was square-cut, angular; the jaw salient, like that of the carnivora.

Bennett also, in *A Man's Woman*, is of the same brotherhood.

> His lower jaw was huge, almost to deformity, like that of a bull-dog, the chin salient, the mouth close-gripped, the great lips indomitable, brutal. The forehead was contracted and small, the forehead of men of single ideas, and the eyes, too, were small and twinkling, one of them marred by a sharply defined cast.

In dealing with women, it was Norris's wont to paint pleasanter pictures. But here too he dwelt mainly on physical attributes. He never wearied of describing their features, the color of their hair and eyes, the fragrance of their neck and arms, their "whole sweet personality." It is curious to see what a fascination woman's hair seems to have had for Norris; it fairly haunted him like

an obsession. He dwelt upon it constantly, lingeringly; it is the one great charm of each and all of his heroines,—they are forever smoothing it, braiding it, putting it up or down; it enters into and lends color to their every mood. Moran Sternerson has "an enormous mane of rye-colored hair," which "whipped across her face and streamed out in the wind like streamers of the northern lights." Travis Bessemer, in *Blix*, "trim and trig and crisp as a crack yacht," also has yellow hair, "not golden nor flaxen, but plain, honest yellow"; "sweet, yellow hair, rolling from her forehead." Lloyd Searight, in *A Man's Woman*, has auburn hair, "a veritable glory; a dull red flame, that bore back from her face in one grand solid roll, dull red like copper or old bronze, thick, heavy, almost gorgeous in its somber radiance." Even small, delicate, anæmic Trina McTeague has "heaps and heaps of blue-black coils and braids, a royal crown of swarthy bands, a veritable sable tiara, heavy, abundant, odorous. All the vitality that should have given color to her face seemed to have been absorbed by this marvelous hair."

But it is not alone the redolence of woman's hair on which Norris likes to dwell; his pages diffuse a veritable carnival of odors. McTeague's dental parlors give forth "a mingled odor of bedding, creosote and ether"; in *Blix* the Chinese

quarter suggests "sandalwood, punk, incense, oil and the smell of mysterious cookery." Here again is the fragrance of the country in midsummer:

During the day the air was full of odors, distilled as it were by high noon. The sweet smell of ripening apples, the fragrance of warm sap and leaves and growing grass, the smell of cows from the nearby pastures, the pungent ammoniacal suggestion of the stable back of the house, and the odor of scorching paint blistering on the southern walls.

And as a companion-piece to the foregoing, here is an unsavory little paragraph, giving a glimpse of the starving occupants of a wind-buffeted tent in the Arctic regions,—a paragraph redeemed only by the dramatic suggestion of the closing words:

The tent was full of foul smells: the smell of drugs and of moldy gunpowder, the smell of dirty rags, of unwashed bodies, the smell of stale smoke, of scorching sealskin, of soaked and rotting canvas that exhaled from the tent cover,—every smell but that of food.

One does not have to read far into Norris before discovering the strong underlying note of primevalism in him, the undisguised delight that he took in pointing out that, in spite of our

boasted civilization, *La Bête Humaine* is still rather close to the surface, our veneer of conventionalism sadly thin. He welcomed eagerly the nature revival in literature: "Mr. Seton and his school . . . opened a door, opened a window, and mere literature has given place to life. The sun has come in and the great winds, and the smell of the baking-alkali on the Arizona deserts and the reek of the tar-weed on the Colorado slopes; and nature has . . . become a thing intimate and familiar and rejuvenating." In his own books, he preferred, wherever possible, to isolate his men and women, to get them away from the artificiality of pink teas and ballrooms, and set them face to face with the open sky and their own passions. He delighted in "the great reach of the ocean floor, the unbroken plane of the blue sky, and the bare, green slope of land,—three immensities, gigantic, vast, primordial," scenes wherein "the mind harks back unconsciously to the broad, simpler, basic emotions, the fundamental instincts of the race." He was nearly always at his best when describing the elemental, unchanging aspects of nature; the "golden eye of a tropic heaven," the "unremitting gallop of unnumbered multitudes of gray-green seas"; the "remorseless scourge of the noon sun" in the desert waste of Death Valley, where "the very shadows shrank away, hiding under sage-bushes," and "all the world was

one gigantic, blinding glare, silent, motionless." Better than any of these is the following picture of the limitless desolation of the Arctic icefields:

> In front of the tent, and over a ridge of barren rock, was an arm of the sea, dotted with blocks of ice, moving silently and swiftly onward; while back from the coast, and back from the tent, and to the south and to the west and to the east, stretched the illimitable waste of land, rugged, gray, harsh, snow and ice and rock, rock and ice and snow, stretching away there under the somber sky, forever and forever, gloomy, untamed, terrible, an empty region—the scarred battlefield of chaotic forces, the savage desolation of a prehistoric world.

Such, in brief, are the materials and the methods of Norris's art as a novelist: big words, big phrases, big ideas, an untrammeled freedom of self-expression. He could not be true to himself, if hampered by a narrow canvas. That is why it is as incongruous to look to Frank Norris for short stories as it would be to set a Rodin to carving cherry pits, or a Verestschagin to tinting lantern slides. Yet it does not follow that the short tales rescued from the magazine files and collected under the title *A Deal in Wheat*, were not worth preservation. On the contrary, they are full of keen interest to the student of fiction. No one but Norris could have written them; every page

testifies to the uncrushable vitality of the man. But to call them short stories is to misname them. They impress one as fragments, rather splendid fragments; trials of the author's strength, before he launched forth upon more serious work. Take, for instance, the opening story which gives the title to the volume. It was palpably written for practice, a sort of five-finger exercise in preparation for Norris's last volume, *The Pit*—and from this point of view it possesses a definite interest. But taken as a story, it is at once too long and too short. He attempted to cover altogether too much ground; he might, with advantage, have brought it to a conclusion some pages sooner,—and yet, when the end is reached, there remains a sense of incompleteness. In the whole collection there is just one story that stands out unique and forceful, "A Memorandum of Sudden Death." This memorandum is a fragment of a journal supposed to be written by a wounded soldier, one of a small company of troopers who have been relentlessly trailed, day after day, by a band of hostile Indians, through desolate miles of sand and sagebrush until the final attack is made. If we agree to overlook the improbability of the whole thing; if we grant that a man with one or two bullets in him, and with his comrades all dead or dying on the ground beside him, could go on recording passing events with

the accuracy, the minuteness, the astounding atmosphere of this story, then we must admit that it is Norris's nearest approach to the artistic unity of the short-story form.

Of Norris's longer stories, *Moran of the Lady Letty* was the first to don the dignity of print, although the greater part of *McTeague* antedates it in point of actual composition. It is a fact not generally known that the nucleus of *McTeague* was submitted as part of the required theme work during Norris's period of post-graduate study at Harvard University, and that it was conscientiously elaborated and polished for four years before it was finally given to the public. *Moran*, the author's one frankly romantic story, was dashed off in an interval of relaxation. Its swift popularity suggested that an easy avenue to fortune lay open to him; for Norris had a lively gift for stories of the blood-and-thunder order, and often entertained his friends by reeling off extemporized sword-and-buckler plots by the yard. But from the beginning he took fiction too seriously to debase it; and even *Moran* has a certain primitive bigness about it, a rhythm of northern runes, a spirit of ancient sagas. There are whole chapters conceived with reckless disregard of plausibility; but that does not make it any the less a strong, fresh idyl of the sea, full of the dash of waves and the pungency of salt

breezes,—full also of health and vitality and clean hearts, and amply redeemed by the brave, frank, loyal character of that "daughter of a hundred Vikings," Moran herself. It is probable that in this volume Norris had no underlying motive, no central idea beyond the wish to tell a story; and yet one likes to think that, consciously or unconsciously, he embodied in Moran his ideal of the muse of fiction, the spirit of the novel of the future. Listen for a moment to his own description of this spirit as given in one of his later essays:

She is a Child of the People, this muse of our fiction of the future, and the wind of a new country, a new heaven and a new earth is in her face and has blown her hair from out the fillets that the Old World muse has bound across her brow, so that it is all in disarray. The tan of the sun is on her cheeks, and the dust of the highway is thick upon her buskin, and the elbowing of many men has torn the robe of her, and her hands are hard with the grip of many things. She is hail-fellow-well-met with every one she meets, unashamed to know the clown and unashamed to face the king, a hardy, vigorous girl, with an arm as strong as a man's and a heart as sensitive as a child's.

Read these words once again and ponder on them; then go back to *Moran of the Lady Letty* and see if you do not find in it a hitherto un-

guessed amplitude, a gladder sense of the joy of living, a deeper pathos in the absolutely right, the artistically inevitable tragedy with which it ends.

Of *McTeague* almost enough has been said already. It is the most frankly brutal thing that Norris ever wrote; its realism is as unsparing as d'Annunzio's, though its theme is cleaner. It is a remorseless study of heredity and environment, symbolizing the greed of gold and dominated throughout by the gigantic figure of the dull and brutish dentist, ox-like, ponderous and slow. Necessarily, it is a repellent book; and yet there is about it that curious attraction which certain forms of ugliness possess when they attain a degree of perfection amounting to a fine art. *McTeague* does not begin to show the breadth of purpose or the technical skill of *The Octopus* or *The Pit;* yet there are times when one is tempted to award it a higher place for all-around excellence. There is a better balance between the central theme and the individual characters,—or to state it differently, between the underlying ethics and the so-called human interest. If Norris had never written another book, he would still have lived in *McTeague*, just as surely as George Douglas Brown still lives in *The House with the Green Shutters.*

Blix, which came next in point of time, offers a sharp, even an astonishing, contrast. It is a

sparkling little love story, clean and wholesome, the chronicle of an unconscious courtship between a young couple who begin by agreeing that they do not love each other, and then try the dangerous experiment of attempting to be simply and frankly good friends. There is an effervescence, an irrepressible bubbling up of youthful spirits, a naïve good comradeship quite free from the embarrassment of sex consciousness, all of which gives to the volume a special piquancy of actuality. One feels that if it were possible to ask Frank Norris a few leading questions about *Blix*, he would have answered, as Marion Crawford answered apropos of *The Three Fates*, and with something of the same wistfulness, "The fact is, I put a good deal of myself into that book."

A Man's Woman is, of all Norris's novels, the nearest approach to a failure, the one that shows the greatest gulf between purpose and accomplishment. The central figures are an Arctic explorer whose heart is divided between two passions, love and ambition; and a woman, "a grand, noble man's woman," strong enough to subordinate her own love for him to the furtherance of that ambition, the discovery of the North Pole. The story abounds in strong situations of an intensity often bordering on the repellent; and the convincing pictures of helpless isolated humanity, agonizing amidst the desolate ice-plains of the far North,

cannot fail to win an honest, even though grudging, recognition. But the book as a whole is keyed a trifle too high; it is overweighted with too ponderous words and phrases, with too tense and too sustained a pressure of emotions. One feels that people could not go on living and keep their sanity, if life were such a constant blare of passions, such a crude, raw presentment of primitive humanity, born out of time,—the Stone Age transferred to the twentieth century. And yet, like all of Norris's work, it has its lure, its compelling force. We will not open the book again, we will not read another line! And yet, wait a moment,—our eye has just caught another passage,—listen to this:

There were six of them left, huddled together in that miserable tent, . . . Their hair and beards were long, and seemed one with the fur covering their bodies. Their faces were absolutely black with dirt, and their limbs were monstrously distended and fat—fat as things bloated and swollen are fat. It was the abnormal fatness of starvation, the irony of misery, the huge joke that Arctic famine plays upon those whom it afterwards destroys. The men moved about at times on their hands and knees; their tongues were distended, round and slate-colored, like the tongues of parrots, and when they spoke they bit them helplessly.

Here in a single paragraph we have the domi-

nant flavor of the book. You may like it or you may not; yet who but Frank Norris could have written it?

It remains now to speak briefly of *The Octopus* and *The Pit*, the opening volumes of the trilogy which Norris was destined never to finish, just as Zola was destined never to finish his tetralogy, *Les Quatre Évangiles*. It is not surprising that, in this Epic of the Wheat, Norris had undertaken a task for which he was hardly ripe, that he was attempting a feat beyond his years and his stature. The vast canvas, the colossal theme, the multitudinous, thronging incident, the crowded stage,—these, we have seen, are Norris's necessary materials,—not throngs of people but of things, immensities of prairie and ocean and sky. But a man must grow slowly to his full attainment; and Norris showed a feverish impatience to attain at a bound heights that he should have been glad to reach after twenty years of slow and sure toiling. Zola had a lifetime of work and twoscore volumes behind him before attempting to sum up the complex life of a whole city in a single volume, *Paris*. Norris, with the experience gained in four volumes and barely eight years of work, wished to sum up the life of a whole continent. *The Octopus* is a vast allegory, an example of symbolism pushed to the extreme limit, rather than a picture of real life. With the two succeeding volumes, it was destined

to portray American life as a whole,—not merely the life of some small corner of a single State, but America in its entirety, with all its hopes and aspirations, from the Canadian to the Mexican border, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. And for the central symbol he chose Wheat, as being quite literally the staff of this life, the ultimate source of American power and prosperity. This first volume, dealing with wheat in the field, shows us a corner of California, the San Joaquin valley, where a handful of ranchmen are engaged in irrigating and plowing, planting, reaping, and harvesting, performing all the slow, arduous toil of cultivation,—and at the same time carrying on a continuous warfare against the persistent encroachment of the railroad, whose steel arms are reaching out, octopus-like, to grasp, encircle and slowly crush, one after another, whoever ventures to oppose it. In a broader sense, it symbolizes the hold that capital has upon labor, the aggression of the corporation and the trust upon the rights of the individual. But back of the individual, stronger than the trusts, is the spirit of the people, the dauntless energy of the nation, typified by the Wheat,—a perennial, exhaustless fruition, a mighty, resistless tide, rising, spreading, gathering force, rolling onward in vast, golden waves throughout the length and breadth of the continent, bearing with it the promise of health and

strength and prosperity. Such is the underlying scheme, the nucleus of *The Octopus;* and the manner in which the technical difficulties have been overcome and the intricate structure reared compels wondering approval even from such readers as find the human story in the book somewhat disappointing. Especially admirable is the way in which Norris's double theme, his twofold symbolism, is kept constantly before the reader like two recurrent and interwoven *leitmotive* of a Wagnerian opera. First, there is the *motif* of the railway, visible symbol of corporate greed, insistent, aggressive, refusing to be forgotten, making its presence felt on every page,—through the shrill scream of a distant engine, the heavy rumble of a passing freight train, the substantial presence of S. Behrmann, the local agent, whose name greets us at the outset of the story in huge flaring letters of a painted sign upon a water-tank, "S. Behrmann has something to say to *you,*" and whose corpulent, imperturbable, grasping personality obtrudes itself continually, placid, unyielding, invincible. Now and then we are brought face to face with the road itself, as, for instance, in the grim, gruesome episode of an engine plowing its way through a flock of sheep which have somehow forced an opening in a barbed-wire fence and strayed upon the track:

The pathos of it was beyond expression. It was a slaughter, a massacre of innocents. The iron monster had charged full into the midst, merciless, inexorable. To the right and left, all the width of the right of way, the little bodies had been flung; backs were snapped against the fence-posts; brains knocked out. Caught in the barbs of the wire, wedged in, the bodies hung suspended. Under foot it was terrible; the black blood, winking in the starlight, seeped down into the clay between the ties with a long sucking murmur. . . . Abruptly, Presley saw again in his imagination the galloping monster, the terror of steel and steam, with its single eye, cyclopean, red, shooting from horizon to horizon; but saw it now as the symbol of a vast power, huge, terrible, flinging the echo of its thunder over all the reaches of the valley, leaving blood and destruction in its path; the leviathan, with tentacles of steel clutching into the soil, the soulless Force, the iron-hearted Power, the Monster, the Colossus, the Octopus.

And simultaneously we have the second *motif* of the Wheat, underlying that of the railroad and, in a measure, subordinated to it, yet always with an unspoken suggestion of final triumph:

Men—motes in the sunshine—perished, were shot down in the very noon of life, hearts were broken, little children started in life lamentably handicapped; young girls were brought to a life of shame; old women died in the heart of life for lack of food. In

that little isolated group of human insects, misery, death and anguish spun like a wheel of fire.

But the wheat remained. Untouched, unassailable, undefiled, that mighty world force, that nourisher of nations, wrapped in Nirvanic calm, indifferent to the human swarm, gigantic, resistless, moved onward in its appointed grooves. Through the welter of blood at the irrigation ditch, through the sham charity and shallow philanthropy of famine relief committees, the great harvest of Los Muertos rolled, like a flood, from the Sierras to the Himalayas to feed thousands of starving scare-crows on the barren plains of India.

Such, in brief, were the plan and purpose of Norris's *Octopus*, a book saturated with the quenchless enthusiasm of youth and conscious strength. One cannot read it without a responsive thrill at the breadth of purpose, the earnestness, the astounding verbal power of its author. But considered as a study of character, a picture of flesh-and-blood humanity, it must be frankly owned that *The Octopus* is as much further away from actuality than *A Man's Woman* as that book was further away than *McTeague*. A few of the characters are good; they promise at first to win our sympathies,—characters like the slow, tenacious German, Hooven; the tall, commanding figure of Magnus Derrick, the "Governor," to whom life was one huge gamble; the coarse-fibered, combative young farmer, Annixter, with his scorn of

"feemales," and his morbid concern over the vagaries of a stomach which would persist in "getting out of whack." But, taken as a whole, the characters do not wear well; they come and go, love, suffer and die; and their joy and their misery fail equally to reach our heart-strings. And of course the reason is simple enough: it is impossible to magnify any one thing vastly excepting at the expense of something else; it is impossible throughout an entire volume to make a Colossus out of a steam-engine or a wheat-field by the simple expedient of calling men and women "human insects," "motes in the sunshine," without at last making us feel that these men and women are rather small, rather insignificant, rather like the ants that we carelessly tread under foot. I think that Norris came to realize his mistake,—at all events, in *The Pit* he pictured humanity on a relatively bigger scale. It is true that here again that term, "human insects," occasionally recurs; that here again the Wheat is the central symbol, a vast world power, chief source of the nation's growth and wealth. But the reason why *The Pit*, considered as a human story, has a stronger, more direct appeal is that the symbolism is kept further in the background, the interest focused more directly on the central characters. And these characters, especially the women, are simpler, and in a measure truer than

those of his earlier volumes; they have less of the primordial and the titanic in their composition and considerably more of the average, every-day foibles and weaknesses. One feels that somehow and somewhere he had gained a deeper insight into the hearts of the men and women about him; and that this was what Owen Wister had in mind when he wrote, "In *The Pit* Norris has risen on stepping-stones to higher things." And yet *The Pit* is just as much a structural part of the whole design of Norris's trilogy as was *The Octopus;* it has that same inherent epic bigness of theme;—a gigantic attempt to corner the entire world's supply of wheat, to force it up, up, up, and hold the price through April, and May, and June,—and then finally the new crop comes pouring in and the daring speculator is overwhelmed by the rising tide, "a human insect, impotently striving to hold back with his puny hand the output of the whole world's granaries."

Such are the books which Norris, with feverish impatience and tireless nervous energy, produced in the few short years that fate allotted him. They stand to-day as the substructure of a temple destined never to be finished, the splendidly rugged torso of a broken statue. That is the way, the best, the truest, the only way, in which to think of Norris's place in American fiction,—as only a partial fulfilment of a rarely brilliant promise.

Had he lived to attain his full stature, there is small doubt that he would have given us bigger, stronger, more vital novels than the younger American school has yet produced.

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AMBROSE BIERCE

AMBROSE BIERCE

In the preface to the fourth volume of his collected works, the volume containing under the title of *Shapes of Clay* the major portion of purely personal satiric verse, Mr. Ambrose Bierce emphatically expresses his belief in the right of any author "to have his fugitive work in newspapers and periodicals put into a more permanent form during his lifetime if he can." No one is likely to dispute Mr. Bierce's contention; but it is often a grave question how far it is wise for the individual to exercise his inalienable rights. And in the case of authors the question comes down to this: How far is it to their own best interests to dilute their finer and more enduring work with that which is mediocre and ephemeral? For it is unfortunately true that no author is measured by his high lights alone, but by the resultant impression of blended light and shade; and there is many a writer among the recognized classics who to-day would take a higher rank had a kindly and discriminating fate assigned three-quarters of his life-work to a merciful oblivion.

To the student of American letters, however, the comprehensive edition of Ambrose Bierce's writings recently issued in ten portly and well-made volumes cannot fail to be welcome. It places at once within convenient reach a great mass of material which, good, bad or indifferent, as the case may be, all helps to throw suggestive side lights upon the author, his methods and his outlook upon life. It forces the reader who perchance has hitherto known Mr. Bierce solely as a master of the short story, to realize that this part of his work has been, throughout a long and busy life, a sort of side issue and that the great measure of his activities has been expended upon social and political satire. And similarly, those who have known him best as the fluent producer of stinging satiric verse suddenly recognize how versatile and many-sided are his literary gifts. The ten volumes are divided as follows: three volumes of prose fiction; two volumes of satiric verse; two volumes of literary and miscellaneous essays; and three volumes consisting mainly of satiric prose, including a greatly amplified edition of that curiously caustic piece of irony, *The Cynic's Word Book*, now for the first time published under the title of Mr. Bierce's own choosing, *The Devil's Dictionary*. It seems, therefore, most convenient to consider Mr. Bierce, the Man of Letters, under three separate aspects: the

Critic, the Satirist and the Master of the Short Story.

Regarding literary criticism, Mr. Bierce says quite frankly "the saddest thing about the trade of writing is that the writer can never know, nor hope to know, if he is a good workman. In literary criticism, there are no criteria, no accepted standards of excellence by which to test the work." Now there is just enough truth in this attitude of mind to make it a rather dangerous one. If there were literally no accepted standards in any of the arts, no principles to which a certain influential majority of critical minds had given their adhesion, then literature and all the arts would be in a state of perennial anarchy. But of course any writer who believes in his heart that there are no criteria will necessarily remain in lifelong ignorance regarding his own worth; for it is only through learning how to criticise others sanely and justly that one acquires even the rudiments of self-criticism. And incidentally, it may be observed that no better proof of Mr. Bierce's fundamental lack of this valuable asset could be asked than the retention in these ten volumes of a considerable amount of journalistic rubbish side by side with flashes of undoubted genius. Mr. Bierce's entire essay on the subject of criticism is a sort of literary agnosticism, a gloomy denial of faith. He has no confidence in the judgment

of the general public nor in that of the professional critic. He admits that "in a few centuries, more or less, there may arrive a critic that we call 'Posterity'"; but Posterity, he complains, is a trifle slow. Accordingly, since the worth of any contemporary writer is reduced to mere guesswork, he, Ambrose Bierce, has scant use for his contemporaries. He has very definite ideas regarding the training of young writers and tells us at some length the course through which he would like to put an imaginary pupil, but he adds:

> If I caught him reading a newly published book, save by way of penance, it would go hard with him. Of our modern education he should have enough to read the ancients: Plato, Aristotle, Marcus Aurelius, Seneca and that lot—custodians of most of what is worth knowing.

In spite of the pains to which Mr. Bierce goes to deny that he is a *laudator temporis acti*, the term fits him admirably—and nowhere is this attitude of mind more conspicuous than in his treatment of the modern novel. It is important, however, to get clearly in mind the arbitrary sense in which he uses the word novel as distinguished from what he chooses to call romance. His occasional half-definitions are somewhat confusing; but apparently by the novel he means realistic fiction as distinguished from romantic fiction—a

distinction complicated by the further idiosyncrasy that by realism he understands almost exclusively the commonplaces of actuality and by romanticism any happening which is out of the ordinary. The novel, then, in his sense of the word is "a snow plant; it has no root in the permanent soil of literature, and does not long hold its place; it is of the lowest form of imagination." And again: "The novel bears the same relation to literature that the panorama bears to painting; with whatever skill and feeling the panorama is painted, it must lack that basic quality in all art, unity, totality of effect." He seems utterly unaware that the great gain in modern fiction, the one indisputable factor that separates it from the fiction of half a century ago, is precisely the basic quality of unity. The modern novel whose technique most nearly approaches perfection is the one which when read rapidly with "a virgin attention at a single sitting"—to borrow Mr. Bierce's own phrase—gives an impression of as single-hearted a purpose as one finds in the most faultless of Maupassant's three-thousand-word masterpieces. It is quite possible for any well-trained reader to go through even the longest of novels at a single sitting. The present writer would feel himself grievously at fault if he interrupted his first reading of any novel that had been given him for the purpose of review;

and he well remembers that in only two recent cases did he become conscious of the prolonged strain: namely, Mr. Kipling's *Kim*, which required an uninterrupted attention of eight and one-half hours, and *The Golden Bowl*, of Mr. James, which required somewhat more than eleven. Mr. Bierce's attitude, however, is partly explained by his *obiter dictum* that "no man who has anything else to do can critically read more than two or three books in a month"—and of course, if you are going to allow an average of ten days to a book, the most perfect unity of purpose is inevitably going to drop out of sight.

All of this helps us to understand how it happens that Mr. Bierce, otherwise a man of intelligence, can say in all seriousness that "in England and America the art of novel writing is as dead as Queen Anne." Listen also to the following literary blasphemy:

> So far as I am able to judge, no good novels are now "made in Germany," nor in France, nor in any European country except Russia. The Russians are writing novels which so far as one may venture to judge . . . are in their way admirable; full of fire and light, like an opal . . . ; in their hands the novel grew great—as it did in those of Richardson and Fielding, and as it would have done in those of Thackeray and Pater if greatness in that form of fiction had been longer possible in England.

Or again:

> Not only is the novel . . . a faulty form of art, but because of its faultiness it has no permanent place in literature. In England it flourished less than a century and a half, beginning with Richardson and ending with Thackeray, since whose death no novels, probably, have been written that are worth attention.

Think for a moment what this means. Here is a man who has ventured to speak seriously about the modern novel, and who confessedly is unaware of the importance of Trollope and Meredith and Hardy, of Henry James and Rudyard Kipling and Maurice Hewlett—and who deliberately ignores the existence of Flaubert and Maupassant and Zola, Galdos and Valdès, Verga and d'Annunzio! It is not astonishing after that to find Mr. Bierce seriously questioning the value of epic poetry: "What more than they gave," he asks, "might we not have had from Virgil (*sic*), Dante, Tasso, Camoëns and Milton, if they had not found the epic poem ready to their misguided hands?"

The fact is that Mr. Bierce as a critic is of the iconoclastic variety. He breaks down but does not build up. He has no patience with the historical form of criticism that traces the intellectual genealogy of authorship, showing, for instance, Maupassant's debt to Poe or Bourget's debt to Stendhal. He is equally intolerant of

that analytical method—the fairest of them all—that judges every written work by its author's purpose as nearly as this may be read between the lines. Nothing is more certain, he says, than if a writer of genius should bring to his task the purposes which the critics trace in the completed work, "the book would remain forever unwritten, to the unspeakable advantage of letters and morals." Yes, he tears down the recognized methods of criticism but suggests nothing better in their place. And when he himself undertakes to criticise, it is hardly ever for the purpose of paying tribute to excellence—with the noteworthy exception, *mirabile dictu*, of his extraordinary praise of George Stirling's poetic orgy of words, "The Wine of Wizardry." Tolstoy, for instance, he defines as a literary giant: "He has a giant's strength and has unfortunately learned to use it like a giant—which means not necessarily with conscious cruelty, but with stupidity." The journal of Marie Bashkirtseff—the last book on earth that one would expect Mr. Bierce to discuss—he sums up as "morbid, hysterical and unpleasant beyond anything of its kind in literature." Among modern critics he pronounces Mr. Howells "the most mischievous, because the ablest, of all this sycophantic crew."

The truth is that the value of Mr. Bierce as a critic lies solely in his fearlessness and downright

sincerity, his unswerving conviction that he is right. He has to a rather greater extent than many a better critic the quality of consistency; and no matter how widely we are forced to disagree with his conclusions there is not one of them that does not throw an interesting side light upon Mr. Bierce, the man.

The short stories and the serious critical papers of Mr. Bierce have appeared in a spasmodic and desultory way, but from first to last he has been at heart a satirist of the school of Lucilius and Juvenal, eager to scourge the follies and the foibles of mankind at large. The fact that Mr. Bierce is absolutely in earnest, that he is destitute of fear and confessedly incorruptible accounts for the oft-repeated statement that he was for years the best loved and the most hated man on the Pacific Coast. Now the ability to use a stinging lash of words is all very well in itself; it is a gift that is none too common. But to be effective it must not be used too freely. The two ample volumes of Mr. Bierce's poetical invectives form a striking object lesson of the wisdom in Hamlet's contention that unless you treat men better than they deserve none will escape a whipping. And when fresh from a perusal of the contents of *Shapes of Clay* and *Black Beetles in Amber*, one has become so accustomed to seeing men flayed alive that a whole skin possesses something of a

novelty. Now there is no question that there is a good deal wrong with the world, just as there always has been, if one takes the trouble to look for it. But when any one man takes upon himself the task of reprimanding the universe, it is not unreasonable that we should ask ourselves in the first instance: What manner of man is this? What are his standards and beliefs? And, if he had his way, what new lamps would he give us in place of the old? In the case of Mr. Bierce it is a little difficult to make answer with full assurance. Somewhere in his preface he has said that he has not attempted to classify his writings under the separate heads of serious, ironical, humorous and the like, assuming that his readers have sufficient intelligence to recognize the difference for themselves. But this is not always easy to do, because in satire these different qualities and moods overlap each other so that there is always the danger of taking too literally what is really an ironical exaggeration. Here, however, is a rather significant passage taken from a serious essay entitled "To Train a Writer"; it sets forth the convictions and the general attitude toward life which Mr. Bierce believes are essential to any young author before he can hope for success—and it is only fair to infer that they represent his own personal views:

He should, for example, forget that he is an American and remember that he is a Man. He should be neither Christian nor Jew, nor Buddhist, nor Mahometan, nor Snake Worshiper. To local standards of right and wrong he should be civilly indifferent. In the virtues, so called, he should discern only the rough notes of a general expediency; in fixed moral principles only time-saving predecisions of cases not yet before the court of conscience. Happiness should disclose itself to his enlarging intelligence as the end and purpose of life; art and love as the only means to happiness. He should free himself of all doctrines, theories, etiquettes, politics, simplifying his life and mind, attaining clarity with breadth and unity with height. To him a continent should not seem wide, nor a century long. And it would be needful that he know and have an ever-present consciousness that this is a world of fools and rogues, blind with superstition, tormented with envy, consumed with vanity, selfish, false, cruel, cursed with illusions—frothing mad!

Now this strikes the average fair-minded person as a rather wholesale indictment of what on the whole has proved to be a pretty good world to live in. In fact, it is difficult to conceive of any one honestly and literally holding so extreme a view and yet of his own volition remaining in such an unpleasant place any longer than the time required to obtain the amount of gunpowder or strychnine sufficient for an effect-

ive exit. But of course Mr. Bierce does not find life half so unpleasant as he professes: in fact, he gives the impression of hugely enjoying himself by voluntarily looking out upon a world grotesquely distorted by the lenses of his imagination. He has of course a perfect right to have as much or as little faith as he chooses in any human religion or philosophy, moral doctrine or political code—only it is well when studying Mr. Bierce as a satirist and reformer to understand clearly his limitations in this respect and to discount his view accordingly. It is well, for instance, to keep in mind, when reading some of his scathing lines directed at small offenders who at most have left the world not much worse off for having lived in it, that Mr. Bierce once eulogized that wholesale destroyer of faith, Robert Ingersoll, as: "a man who taught all the virtues as a duty and a delight—who stood, as no other man among his countrymen has stood, for liberty, for honor, for good will toward men, for truth as it was given him to see it."

To the present writer there is much that is keenly irritating in Mr. Bierce's satiric verse for the reasons above implied. It is, of course, highly uncritical to find fault with a writer for no better reason than because you find yourself out of harmony with his religious and moral faith, or his lack of it—for an author's personal beliefs

should have no bearing upon the artistic value of what he produces. But putting aside personal prejudice, it may be said in all fairness that Mr. Bierce made a mistake in giving a permanent form to so large a body of his fugitive verses. It is not quite true that satiric poetry is read with the same interest after the people at whom it was directed are forgotten. Aristophanes and Horace and Juvenal cannot be greatly enjoyed to-day without a good deal of patient delving for the explanation of local and temporal allusions; and in modern times Pope's *Dunciad*, for instance, is probably to-day the least important and the least read of all his writings. It is impossible to take much interest in vitriolic attacks made twenty years ago upon various obscure Californians whose names mean nothing at all to the world at large. But, on the other hand, any one can understand and enjoy the sweeping irony as well as the sheer verbal cleverness of a parody like the following:

A RATIONAL ANTHEM

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of felony,
  Of thee I sing—
Land where my fathers fried
Young witches and applied
Whips to the Quaker's hide
  And made him spring.

My knavish country, thee,
Land where the thief is free,
  Thy laws I love;
I love thy thieving bills
That tap the people's tills;
I love thy mob whose will's
  All laws above.

Let Federal employees
And rings rob all they please,
  The whole year long.
Let office-holders make
Their piles and judges rake
Our coin. For Jesus' sake,
  Let's *all* go wrong!

One is tempted to devote considerably more space than is warranted to that extremely clever collection of satiric definitions, *The Devil's Dictionary*. It represents a deliberate pose consistently maintained, it is pervaded with a spirit of what a large proportion of readers in a Christian country would pronounce irreverent, it tells us nothing new and can hardly be conceived of as an inspiration for higher and nobler living. But it is undeniably entertaining reading. Almost any one must smile over such specimens as the following, taken almost at random:

Monday, *n.* In Christian countries, the day after the baseball game.

BACCHUS, *n.* A convenient deity invented by the ancients as an excuse for getting drunk.

POSITIVE, *adj.* Mistaken at the top of one's voice.

But it is as a writer of short stories that Mr. Bierce's future fame rests upon a firm foundation. It is not too much to say that within his own chosen field—the grim, uncompromising horror story, whether actual or supernatural—he stands among American writers second only to Edgar Allan Poe. And this is all the more remarkable when we consider his expressed scorn of new books and modern methods and his implied indifference to the development of modern technique. He does understand and consciously seeks for that unity of effect which is the foundation stone of every good short story; yet in sheer technical skill there is scarcely one among the recognized masters of the short story to-day, Mr. Kipling, for instance, and the late O. Henry, Jack London and a score of his contemporaries, from whom he might not learn something to his profit. What Mr. Bierce's habits of workmanship may be the present writer does not happen to know; it is possible that he has always striven as hard to build an underlying structure, a preliminary scaffolding, for each story as ever Edgar Allan Poe did. But if so he has been singularly successful in practising the art which so artfully all things conceals. He gives

the impression of one telling a story with a certain easy spontaneity and attaining his results through sheer instinct. He seldom attempts anything like a unity of time and place; and many of his short tales have the same fault which he criticises in the modern novel: namely, that of having a panoramic quality, of being shown to us in a succession of more or less widely separated scenes and incidents.

Nevertheless, in most cases his stories are their own best justification. We may not agree with the method that he has chosen to use, but we cannot escape from the strange, haunting power of them, the grim, boding sense of their having happened—even the most weird, most supernatural, most grotesquely impossible of them—in precisely the way that he has told them.

The stories, such of them at least as really count and represent Mr. Bierce at his best, divide themselves into two groups: first, the Civil War stories, based upon his own four years' experience as a soldier during the Rebellion, and unsurpassed in American fiction for the unsparing clearness of their visualization of war. And secondly, the frankly supernatural stories contained in the volume entitled *Can Such Things Be?*—stories in which the setting is immaterial because if *such things could be* they would be independent of time

and space. The war stories range through the entire gamut of heroism, suffering and carnage. They are stamped in all their physical details with a pitiless realism unequaled by Stendhal in the famous Waterloo episode in the *Chartreuse de Parme* and at least unsurpassed by Tolstoy or by Zola. Indeed, there is nothing fulsome or extravagant in the statement that has more than once been made that Mr. Bierce is a sort of American Maupassant. And what is most remarkable about these stories is that they never fail of a certain crescendo effect. Keyed as they are to a high pitch of human tragedy, there is always one last turn of the screw, one crowning horror held in reserve until the crucial moment. Take, for example, "A Horseman in the Sky." A sentinel whose duty it is to watch from a point of vantage overlooking a deep gorge and a vast plain beyond, to see that no scout of the Southern army shall discover a trail down the precipitous sides of the opposite slope, suddenly perceives a solitary horseman making his way along the verge of the precipice within easy range of fire. The sentinel watches and hesitates; takes aim and delays his fire. The scene shifts with the disconcerting suddenness of a modern moving picture and we see the sentinel back in his Southern home at the outbreak of the war; and we overhear the controlled bitterness of his parting with his South-

ern father after declaring his intention to fight for the Union. A modern story teller would consider this shifting of scene bad art; nevertheless, Mr. Bierce, in theatrical parlance, "gets it over." Back again he shifts us with a rush to the lonely horseman, shows him for a moment motionless upon the brink and the next instant launched into space, a wonderful, miraculous, awe-inspiring figure, proudly erect upon a stricken and dying horse, whose legs spasmodically continue their mad gallop throughout the downward flight to the inevitable annihilation below. This in itself, told with Ambrose Bierce's compelling art, is sufficiently harrowing, but he has something more in reserve. Listen to this:

"Did you fire?" the sergeant whispered.

"Yes."

"At what?"

"A horse. It was standing on yonder rock—pretty far out. You see it is no longer there. It went over the cliff."

The man's face was white, but he showed no other signs of emotion. Having answered, he turned away his eyes and said no more. The sergeant did not understand.

"See here, Druce," he said, after a moment's silence, "it's no use making a mystery. I order you to report. Was there anybody on the horse?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"My father."

And again, there is that extraordinary *tour de force* entitled "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." It is the story of a spy caught and about to be hanged by the simple expedient of allowing the board on which he stands to tilt up and drop him between the cross-beams of the bridge. The story is of considerable length. It details with singular and compelling vividness what follows from the instant that the spy feels himself dropped, feels the rope tighten around his neck and its fibers strain and snap under his weight. His plunge into the stream below, his dash for life under cover of the water, his flight, torn and bleeding, through thorns and brambles, his miraculous dodging of outposts and his passing unscathed through volleys of rapid fire, all read like a hideous nightmare—and so in fact they are, because the entire story of his rush for safety lasting long hours and days in reality is accomplished in a mere fraction of time, the instant of final dissolution—because, as it happened, the rope did not break and at the moment that he thought he had attained safety his body ceased to struggle and dangled limply beneath the Owl Creek Bridge. Variations upon this theme of the rapidity of human thought in the moment of

death are numerous. There is, for instance, a memorable story by Morgan Robertson called, if memory is not at fault, "From the Main Top," in which a lifetime is crowded into the fraction of time required for the action of gravity. But no one has ever used it more effectually than Mr. Bierce.

But it is in his supernatural stories that Mr. Bierce shows even more forcefully his wizardry of word and phrase, his almost magnetic power to make the absurd, the grotesque, the impossible, carry an overwhelming conviction. He will tell you, for instance, a story of a man watching at night alone by the dead body of an old woman; a cat makes its way into the room and springs upon the corpse; and to the man's overwrought imagination it seems as though that dead woman seized the cat by the neck and flung it violently from her. "Of course you imagined it," says the friend to whom he afterwards tells the tale. "I thought so, too," rejoins the man, "but the next morning her stiffened fingers still held a handful of black fur."

For sheer mad humor there is nothing more original than the tale called "A Jug of Syrup." A certain old and respected village grocer, who through a lengthy life has never missed a day at his desk, dies and his shop is closed. One night the village banker and leading citizen on his way

home drops in from force of habit at the grocery, finding the door wide open, and buys a jug of syrup, absent-mindedly forgetting that the grocer who serves him has been dead three weeks. The jug is a heavy weight to carry; yet when he reaches home he has nothing in his hand. The tale spreads like wildfire through the village and the next night a vast throng is assembled in front of the brightly lit-up grocery, breathlessly watching the shadowy form of the deceased methodically casting up accounts. One by one, they pluck up courage and make their way into the grocery—all but the banker. Riveted to the spot by the grotesque horror of the sight he stands and watches, while pandemonium breaks loose. To him in the road the shop is still brilliantly lighted but to those who have gone within it presents the darkness of eternal night and in their unreasoning fear they kick and scratch and bite and trample upon one another with the primordial savageness of the mob. And all the while the shadowy figure of the dead grocer continues undisturbed to balance his accounts.

It is a temptation to linger beyond all reason over one after another of these extraordinary and haunting imaginings, such for instance, as "Moxon's Master," in which an inventor, having made a a mechanical chess-player, makes the mistake of beating it at the game and is promptly strangled

to death by the revengeful puppet of his own creation. But it is impossible to do justice to all these stories separately and it remains only to single out one typical example in which perhaps he reached the very pinnacle of his strange fantastic genius, "The Death of Halpin Frayser." The theme of the story is this: it is sufficiently horrible to be confronted with a disembodied spirit, but there is one degree of horror beyond this, namely, to have to face the reanimated body of some one long dead from whom the soul has departed—because, so Mr. Bierce tells us, with the departure of the soul all natural affection, all kindliness has departed also, leaving only the base instincts of brutality and revenge. Now in the case of Halpin Frayser, it happens that the body which he is fated to encounter under these hideously unnatural conditions is that of his own mother; and in a setting as curiously and poetically unreal as any part of "Kubla Khan" he is forced to realize that this mother whom he had in life worshiped as she worshiped him is now, in spite of her undiminished beauty, a foul and bestial thing intent only upon taking his life. In all imaginative literature it would be difficult to find a parallel for this story in sheer, unadulterated hideousness.

Mr. Ambrose Bierce as a story teller can never achieve a wide popularity, at least among the

Angle-Saxon race. His writings have too much the flavor of the hospital and the morgue. There is a stale odor of moldy cerements about them. But to the connoisseur of what is rare, unique and very perfect in any branch of fiction he must appeal strongly as one entitled to hearty recognition as an enduring figure in American letters. No matter how strongly he may offend individual convictions and prejudices with the flippant irreverence of his satiric writings, it is easy to forgive him all this and much more besides for the sake of any single one of a score or more of his best stories.

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The following bibliography of the writers discussed in the present volume does not pretend to be exhaustive. It has taken no heed of the occasional, and in some cases the abundant, contributions these authors have made to periodical literature. It has not attempted to indicate translations into foreign languages (although in some cases, notably Marion Crawford and Kate Douglas Wiggin, such translations have been numerous and of interesting diversity), nor to collect the critical studies by foreign critics. It does give a convenient chronological list of the published volumes of each author, together with the publisher; a list of critical or biographical articles for the purpose of further study, and a small collection of reviews of the more important novels. Its main purpose is to be suggestive rather than final; and to indicate, by what it gives, the sources from which readers and students of contemporary fiction may, if they choose, glean further information.

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The Crossing, reviewed, *Academy,* 64, 49; *Athenæum,* '04, 2, 256; A. B. Maurice, *Bookman,* 19, 607; O. H. Dunbar, *Critic,* 45, 187; M. K. Ford, *Current Lit.,* 37, 36; W. H. Payne, *Dial,* 37, 38; *Independent,* 57, 41; E. Hoyt, *Lamp,* 28, 507; *Nation,* 79, 120; A. F. Hancock, *Outlook,* 77, 753; *Reader,* 4, 345.

Mr. Crewe's Career, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '08, 1, 723; *Current Lit.,* 45, 109; *Nation,* 86, 447.

A Modern Chronicle, reviewed, *Academy,* 78, 397; *Athenæum,* '10, 1, 576; *Bookman,* 31, 306; *Cath. World,* 91, 391; *Cur. Lit.,* 49, 100; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 48, 395; *Independent,* 68, 1037; *Lit. Dig.,* 40, 927; *Nation,* 90, 318; *Outlook,* 94, 956; *Rev. of Rev.,* 41, 636; *Sat. Rev.,* 109, 633; *Spectator,* 104, 984.

Richard Carvel, reviewed, W. E. Simonds, *Atlantic,* 85, 410.

FRANCIS MARION CRAWFORD

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

Mr. Isaacs, 1882 (Macmillan).
Dr. Claudius, 1883 (Macmillan).
A Roman Singer, 1884 (Houghton, Mifflin).
To Leeward, 1884 (Houghton, Mifflin).
An American Politician, 1884 (Macmillan).
Zoroaster, 1885 (Macmillan).
The Tale of a Lonely Parish, 1886 (Macmillan).
Marzio's Crucifix, 1887 (Macmillan).
Saracinesca, 1887 (Macmillan).
Paul Patoff, 1887 (Macmillan).
With the Immortals, 1888 (Macmillan).
Greifenstein, 1889 (Macmillan).
Sant' Ilario, 1889 (Macmillan).
A Cigarette Maker's Romance, 1890 (Macmillan).
Khaled, 1891 (Macmillan).

The Witch of Prague, 1891 (Macmillan).
The Three Fates, 1891 (Macmillan).
Children of the King, 1892 (Macmillan).
Don Orsino, 1892 (Macmillan).
Marion Darche, 1893 (Macmillan).
The Novel: What It Is, 1893 (Macmillan).
Pietro Ghisleri, 1893 (Macmillan).
Katharine Lauderdale, 1894 (Macmillan).
The Upper Berth, 1894 (Putnam).
Love in Idleness, 1894 (Macmillan).
Casa Braccio, 1895 (Macmillan).
Constantinople, 1895 (Scribner).
The Ralstons, 1895 (Macmillan).
Adam Johnson's Son, 1896 (Macmillan).
Taquisara, 1895 (Macmillan).
Corleone: A Tale of Sicily, 1896 (Macmillan).
A Rose of Yesterday, 1897 (Macmillan).
Ave Roma Immortalis, 1898 (Macmillan).
Via Crucis, 1899 (Macmillan).
In the Palace of the King, 1900 (Macmillan).
Rulers of the South, 1900 (Macmillan).
Marietta, 1901 (Macmillan).
Cecilia: A Story of Modern Rome, 1902 (Macmillan).
The Heart of Rome, 1903 (Macmillan).
Man Overboard, 1903 (Macmillan).
The Life of Pope Leo XIII, 1904 (Macmillan).
Whosoever Shall Offend, 1904 (Macmillan).
Fair Margaret: A Portrait, 1905 (Macmillan).
Salve Venetia, 1905 (Macmillan).
A Lady of Rome, 1906 (Macmillan).
Arethusa, 1907 (Macmillan).
The Little City of Hope, 1907 (Macmillan).
The Primadonna, 1908 (Macmillan).
The Diva's Ruby, 1908 (Macmillan).
The White Sister, 1909 (Macmillan).
Wandering Ghosts, 1911 (Macmillan).

II. CRITICAL ESTIMATES, ETC.

Academy, "Crawford at Home," 53, 23.
Blackwood's, Critical Article on Crawford the Novelist, 136, 296.
Bookman, "Crawford's Workshop," 22, 443.
Brett, G. P., "Crawford the Novelist and Historian," *Outlook,* 91, 915.
Bridges, Robert, Interview with Crawford, *McClure's,* 4, 316.
Carpenter, H. T., "Crawford and His Home at Sorrento," *Munsey's,* 41, 547.
Church Quarterly, "The Novels of Marion Crawford," 30, 29.
Garrett, C. H., "A Talk with Crawford," *Lamp,* 27, 216.
Hale, Louise C., "Crawford's Rome," *Bookman,* 15, 350.
Meredith, G. E., "The Latest Novels of Crawford," *Church Review,* 52, 343.
Critic, Interview with Crawford, 21, 302.
Critic, Crawford's Literary Views, 22, 97.
Edinburgh Review, "The Novels of Marion Crawford," 204, 61.
Egan, M. F., Critical Study of Crawford, *Amer. Cath. Quart.,* 17, 621.
Faust, A. J., "Two New Novelists" (Crawford and A. S. Hardy).
Lanier, Ch. D., "Francis Marion Crawford, Novelist," *Rev. of Rev.,* 6, 712.
Munsey's, "Crawford and His Work," 17, 85.
Nation, "Chronological List of Crawford's Works," 88, 380.
Ouida, "The Italian Novels of Crawford," *Nineteenth Century,* 42, 719; same article, *Liv. Age,* 215, 829.
Outlook, "The Career of Crawford," 91, 856.

Review of Reviews, " Crawford the Novelist," 39, 636.
Robinson, Janetta N., " A Study of Crawford," *Westminster Rev.,* 137, 379.
Stimpson, M. S., Personal Sketch of Crawford, *New Eng. Mag.,* n.s., 34, 572.
Trent, W. P., " Marion Crawford," *Suwanee Mag.,* 2, 239.
Vedder, H. C., *American Writers,* New York, 1895.
Warner Library, 7, 4151.

III. SEPARATE REVIEWS

Arethusa, reviewed, *Academy,* 73, 251; *Current Lit.,* 44, 338; *Nation,* 85, 496.
Cecilia, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '02, 2, 679; *Bookman,* 16, 378; *Nation,* 76, 40.
Children of the King, reviewed, *Academy,* 43, 368; *Athenæum,* '93, 1, 277.
Corleone, reviewed, *Spectator,* 79, 776.
A Cigarette Maker's Romance, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '90, 2, 539; *Nation,* 51, 506.
Dr. Claudius, reviewed, *Literary World* (Boston), 14, 187; *Nation,* 36, 552; *Saturday Review,* 55, 844; *Spectator,* 56, 1552.
Don Orsino, reviewed, *Academy,* 43, 77; *Athenæum,* '92, 2, 699.
Fair Margaret, reviewed, *Academy,* 69, 1201; *Athenæum,* '05, 2, 758; *Bookman,* 22, 373; *Cath. World,* 82, 837; *Indep.,* 60, 111; *Lit. Dig.,* 32, 172; *Pub. Opin.,* 40, 26; *Spectator,* 96, 28.
Greifenstein, reviewed, *Academy,* 35, 338; *Athenæum,* '89, 1, 50; *Blackwood,* 145, 822.
Heart of Rome, reviewed, *Bookman,* 18, 412; *Dial,* 36, 18; *Nation,* 77, 391.
In the Palace of the King, reviewed, *Academy,* 59, 417; *Athenæum,* '00, 2, 577; C. Hovey, *Bookman,* 12, 347; *Nation,* 72, 97.

Mr. Isaacs, reviewed, *Academy,* 22, 465; *Athenæum,* '82, 2, 809; *Literary World* (Boston), 14, 6; *Nation,* 36, 151; *Saturday Review,* 55, 215; *Spectator,* 56, 191.

Katharine Lauderdale, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '94, 1, 505.

Khaled, reviewed, *Academy,* 40, 32; *Athenæum,* '91, 1, 728.

Marzio's Crucifix, reviewed, *Academy,* 32, 282; *Athenæum,* '87, 2, 865.

Paul Patoff, reviewed, *Academy,* 32, 420.

Pietro Ghisleri, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '93, 2, 125.

A Roman Singer, reviewed, *Nation,* 38, 531.

A Rose of Yesterday, reviewed, *Spectator,* 78, 922.

Sant' Ilario, reviewed, *Academy,* 36, 147; *Athenæum,* '89, 2, 218; *Atlantic,* 65, 122.

Saracinesca, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '87, 1, 542.

A Tale of a Lonely Parish, reviewed, *Atlantic,* 57, 853.

To Leeward, reviewed, *Atlantic,* 53, 277; *Critic,* 3, 521; *Nation,* 54, 193; *Spectator,* 57, 381.

The Three Fates, reviewed, *Academy,* 41, 561; *Athenæum,* '92, 1, 598; *Nation,* 54, 457.

Via Crucis, reviewed, F. Dredd, *Bookman,* 11, 92; *American Catholic,* 25, 402.

Wandering Ghosts, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '11, 1, 443; *Cath. World,* 93, 259.

Whosoever Shall Offend, reviewed, *Academy,* 64, 385; *Bookman,* 20, 364; *Catholic World,* 80, 403; *Current Lit.,* 37, 539.

The Witch of Prague, reviewed, Wm. Sharp, *Academy,* 40, 193; *Athenæum,* '91, 2, 251.

With the Immortals, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '88, 2, 126.

Zoroaster, reviewed, *Academy,* 27, 416.

ELLEN GLASGOW

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

The Descendant, 1897 (Harper).
Phases of an Inferior Planet, 1898 (Harper).
The Voice of the People, 1900 (Doubleday).
The Freeman and Other Poems, 1902 (Doubleday).
The Battleground, 1902 (Doubleday).
The Deliverance, 1904 (Doubleday).
The Wheel of Life, 1906 (Doubleday).
The Ancient Law, 1908 (Doubleday).
The Romance of a Plain Man, 1909 (Doubleday).
The Miller of Old Church, 1911 (Doubleday).

II. CRITICAL ESTIMATES, ETC.

Book News, Sketch of Ellen Glasgow, 19, 1.
Current Literature, Personal Sketch of Miss Glasgow, 32, 623.
Marcosson, I. F., "The Personal Ellen Glasgow," *Bookman,* 29, 619.
Outlook, "*The Deliverance* and Harland's *My Friend Prospero,*" 76, 395.
World's Work, "Three Novelists of Sincerity and Charm," 5, 2790.

III. SEPARATE REVIEWS

The Ancient Law, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '08, 380; *Bookman,* 27, 59; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 14, 134; *Indep.,* 64, 469; *Nation,* 86, 152; L. C. Willcox, *North Amer. Rev.,* 187, 444; *Outlook,* 88, 511; *Rev. of Rev.,* 37, 761; *Sat. Rev.,* 105; *Spectator,* 100, 505.
The Battleground, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '02, 1, 812; C. Hovey, *Bookman,* 15, 268; *Critic,* 41, 279; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 32, 385.

The Deliverance, reviewed, *Academy,* 66, 273; H. W. Preston, *Atlantic,* 93, 852; *Athenæum,* '04, 2, 201; E. C. Marsh, *Bookman,* 19, 73; *Current Lit.,* 36, 315; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 36, 119; *Nation,* 78, 234; *Outlook,* 76, 395.

The Miller of Old Church, reviewed, W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 51, 51; *Lit. Dig.,* 43, 26; *Nation,* 93, 33.

The Romance of a Plain Man, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '09, 2, 424; *Current Lit.,* 47, 460.

The Voice of the People, reviewed, *Academy,* 59, 133; *Atlantic,* 86, 416; *Athenæum,* '00, 2, 179; *Book Buyer,* 20, 308; *Bookman,* 11, 397; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 29, 23; *Nation,* 70, 402; *Saturday Rev.,* 90, 180; *World's Work,* 5, 2791.

The Wheel of Life, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '06, 1, 420; *Current Lit.,* 40, 338.

"O. HENRY"

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

Cabbages and Kings, 1905 (McClure, Phillips).
The Four Million, 1906 (McClure, Phillips).
The Trimmed Lamp, 1907 (McClure, Phillips).
The Heart of the West, 1907 (McClure, Phillips).
The Gentle Grafter, 1908 (Doubleday).
The Voice of the City, 1908 (Doubleday).
Roads of Destiny, 1909 (Doubleday).
Strictly Business, 1910 (Doubleday).
Whirligigs, 1910 (Doubleday).

II. CRITICAL ESTIMATES, ETC.

Bookman, "Biography of O. Henry (Chronicle)," 32, 6; 32, 235; 32, 449.

Bookman, "The Personal O. Henry (Chronicle)," 29, 345; 29, 579.

Bookman, Sketch of O. Henry (Chronicle), 31, 456.

Forman, Justus Miles, "O Henry's Shorter Stories," *North Amer. Rev.*, 187, 781.
Nathan, G. P., "O. Henry in His Own Bagdad," *Bookman*, 31, 477.
Peck, H. T., "Representative American Story Tellers: O. Henry," *Bookman*, 31, 131.
Steger, Peyton, *Life of O. Henry* (in press), 1911 (Doubleday).

III. SEPARATE REVIEWS

Cabbages and Kings, reviewed, Stanhope Searles, *Bookman*, 20, 561.
The Heart of the West, reviewed, *Nation*, 85, 496.
Strictly Business, reviewed, *Nation*, 90, 348.
The Trimmed Lamp, reviewed, *Nation*, 85, 16.
The Voice of the City, *Nation*, 87, 12.
Whirligigs, reviewed, *Independent*, 69, 987; *Nation*, 91, 417.

ROBERT HERRICK

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

The Man Who Wins, 1895 (Scribner).
Literary Love Letters and Other Stories, 1896 (Scribner).
The Gospel of Freedom, 1898 (Macmillan).
Love's Dilemmas, 1898 (Stone).
The Web of Life, 1900 (Macmillan).
The Real World, 1901 (Macmillan).
Their Child, 1903 (Macmillan).
The Common Lot, 1904 (Macmillan).
The Memoirs of an American Citizen, 1905 (Macmillan).
The Master of the Inn, 1908 (Macmillan).
Together, 1908 (Macmillan).
A Life for a Life, 1910 (Macmillan).

II. CRITICAL ESTIMATES, ETC.

Howells, W. D., "The Novels of Herrick," *North Amer. Rev.*, 189, 812.

III. SEPARATE REVIEWS

The Common Lot, reviewed, *Athenæum*, '05, 1, 11; W. M. Payne, *Dial*, 37, 311; *Nation*, 79, 379; *Outlook*, 78, 461.

A Life for a Life, reviewed, *Athenæum*, '10, 2, 64; *Atlantic*, 106, 814; *Cur. Lit.*, 49, 224; W. M. Payne, *Dial*, 49, 39; *Independent*, 69, 77; *Nation*, 90, 586; *Outlook*, 95, 490; *Rev. of Rev.*, 42, 123; *Sat. Rev.*, 110, 53.

Memoirs of an American Citizen, reviewed, *Critic*, 47, 476; *Nation*, 81, 205.

The Real World, reviewed, *Critic*, 40, 149; F. M. Mandeville, *Bookman*, *Athenæum*, '02, 1, 12.

Together, reviewed, *Academy*, 75, 331; *Arena*, 40, 576; W. M. Payne, *Dial*, 45, 213; *Indep.*, 65, 263; *Lit. Dig.*, 37, 852; *Nation*, 87, 96; *Outlook*, 89, 956; *Rev. of Rev.*, 38, 508.

The Web of Life, reviewed, *Athenæum*, '00, 2, 245; *Bookman*, 12, 90; *Dial*, 29, 124.

FRANK NORRIS

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

Yvernelle (long poem), 1892 (Lippincott).

Moran of the Lady Letty, 1898 (Doubleday and McC.).

McTeague, 1899 (Doubleday and McC.).

Blix, 1899 (Doubleday and McC.).

A Man's Woman, 1900 (Doubleday and McC.).

The Octopus, 1901 (Doubleday, Page).

The Pit, 1903 (Doubleday, Page).
The Responsibilities of a Novelist, 1903 (Doubleday, Page).
A Deal in Wheat and Other Stories, 1903 (Doubleday, Page).
The Complete Works of Frank Norris, Golden Gate Edition (limited to one hundred numbered sets), 1903 (Doubleday, Page).
The Third Circle, 1909 (Lane).

II. CRITICAL ESTIMATES, ETC.

Garland, Hamlin, "The Work of Frank Norris," *Critic,* 42, 216.
Goodrich, Arthur, "Norris the Man," *Current Lit.,* 34, 105.
Howells, W. D., "Norris as a Novelist," *North Amer.,* 175, 769.
Irwin, Will, Introduction to *The Third Circle* (1909).
Levick, Milne B., "The Literary Work of Norris," *Overland,* n.s., 45, 504.
Millard, P., "Frank Norris," *Out West,* 18, 49.
Preston, H. W., "The Novels of Norris," *Atlantic,* 91, 691.
Rainsford, W. S., "Frank Norris," *World's Work,* 5, 3276.
Wister, Owen, Article on *The Pit, World's Work,* 5, 3133.

III. SEPARATE REVIEWS

Blix, reviewed, *Academy,* 59, 111.
A Deal in Wheat, reviewed, *Academy,* 65, 501; *Athenæum,* '03, 2, 613; *Bookman,* 18, 311.
McTeague, reviewed, *Academy,* 57, 746; *Athenæum,* '99, 2, 757.
A Man's Woman, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '00, 2, 547; *Critic,* 36, 352; *Independent,* 52, 611.

The Octopus, reviewed, *Academy,* 61, 210; B. O. Flower, in *Arena,* 27, 547; *Athenæum,* '01, 2, 447; H. W. Boynton, *Atlantic,* 89, 708; A. S. Van Westrum, *Book Buyer,* 22, 326; *Bookman,* 13, 245; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 31, 136; *Indep.,* 53, 1139; *Overland,* n.s., 37, 1050.

The Pit, reviewed, *Academy,* 64, 153; *Arena,* 29, 440; *Athenæum,* '03, 2, 204; A. B. Payne, *Bookman,* 16, 565; *Indep.,* 55, 331; *Outlook,* 73, 152.

The Third Circle, reviewed, *Academy,* 77, 419.

DAVID GRAHAM PHILLIPS

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

A Woman Ventures, 1902 (Stokes).

Her Serene Highness, 1902 (Harper).

The Master Rogue, 1903 (McClure).

The Golden Fleece, 1903 (McClure).

The Great God, Success, 1903 (Stokes).

The Cost, 1904 (Bobbs, Merrill).

The Plum Tree, 1905 (Bobbs, Merrill).

The Reign of Gilt, 1905 (Pott).

The Social Secretary, 1905 (Bobbs, Merrill).

The Deluge, 1905 (Bobbs, Merrill).

The Fortune Hunter, 1906 (Bobbs, Merrill).

The Light-Fingered Gentry, 1907 (Bobbs, Merrill).

The Second Generation, 1907 (Appleton).

Old Wives for New, 1908 (Appleton).

The Worth of a Woman; A Play in Four Acts, 1908 (Appleton).

The Hungry Heart, 1909 (Appleton).

The Fashionable Adventures of Joshua Craig, 1909 (Appleton).

White Magic, 1910 (Appleton).

The Husband's Story, 1910 (Appleton).

The Grain of Dust, 1911 (Appleton).

The Conflict, 1911 (Appleton).

II. CRITICAL ESTIMATES, ETC.

American Magazine, "Phillips the Fighter," 71.
Arena, Personal Sketch of Phillips, 38, 669.
Bookman, "The Literary Work of Phillips," 21, 342.
Cosmopolitan, "Phillips the Fighter," 51, 287.
Critic, "David Graham Phillips," Sketch, 45, 8.
Flower, B. O., "A Twentieth Century Novelist of Democracy," *Arena,* 35, 252.

III. SEPARATE REVIEWS

The Cost, reviewed, *Arena,* 32, 215; *Athenæum,* '05, 2, 366; *Nation,* 79, 121.
Golden Fleece, reviewed, E. Hoyt, *Lamp,* 26, 429.
A Grain of Dust, reviewed, *Independent,* 70, 1066.
The Great God Success, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '02, 1, 330; *Book Buyer,* 23, 230.
The Husband's Story, reviewed, W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 49, 289; *Lit. Dig.,* 41, 704; *Nation,* 91, 339; *N. Y. Times,* 15, 535.
Old Wives for New, reviewed, *Arena,* 39, 509; *Bookman,* 27, 495; *Cur. Lit.,* 44, 683; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 44, 350; *Indep.,* 64, 808; *Nation,* 86, 264; *Outlook,* 88, 838; *Putnam's,* 4, 621; *Rev. of Rev.,* 37, 762.
The Second Generation, reviewed, *Current Lit.,* 42, 458; *Nation,* 84, 85.
The Social Secretary, reviewed, *Critic,* 48, 92.

NEWTON BOOTH TARKINGTON

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

The Gentleman from Indiana, 1899 (McClure).
Monsieur Beaucaire, 1900 (McClure).

The Two Vanrevels, 1902 (McClure).
Cherry, 1903 (Harper).
In the Arena, 1905 (McClure).
The Conquest of Canaan, 1905 (Harper).
The Beautiful Lady, 1905 (McClure).
His Own People, 1907 (Doubleday).
The Guest of Quesney, 1908 (McClure).
Beasley's Christmas Party, 1909 (Harper).

II. CRITICAL ESTIMATES, ETC.

Book News, Sketch of Tarkington, 18, 325.
Garrett, C. H., Article on Tarkington, *Outlook,* 72, 817.
Maurice, Arthur Bartlett, "Representative American Story Tellers: Booth Tarkington," *Bookman,* 24, 605.
Personal Sketch, *Critic,* 36, 399.
Personal Sketch, *Current Lit.,* 30, 280.
Personal Sketch, *Harper's Weekly,* 46, 1773.

III. SEPARATE REVIEWS

The Beautiful Lady, reviewed, *Bookman,* 21, 615; *Critic,* 47, 286; *Cur. Lit.,* 39, 344; *Independent,* 59, 580; *Lit. Dig.,* 21, 93; *Rev. of Rev.,* 32, 760.
Cherry, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '04, 2, 234; James MacArthur, *Harper's W.,* 47, 1961.
The Conquest of Canaan, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '95, 2, 829; E. C. Marsh, *Bookman,* 22, 517; *Critic,* 48, 286; *Cur. Lit.,* 40, 109; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 40, 155; *Indep.,* 59, 1153; *Lit. Dig.,* 32, 495; L. C. Willcox, *North Amer. Rev.,* 182, 926; *Outlook,* 81, 708; *Reader,* 7, 224.
The Gentleman from Indiana, reviewed, *Academy,* 58, 459; *Saturday Review,* 89, 816.

The Guest of Quesney, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '08, 2, 757; E. C. Marsh, *Bookman,* 28, 273; *Indep.,* 65, 1061; W. G. Bowdoin, *Indep.,* 65, 1464; *Outlook,* 90, 362; Agnes Repplier, *Outlook,* 90, 700.
His Own People, reviewed, *Nation,* 85, 400.
In the Arena, reviewed, *Academy,* 68, 472; *Athenæum,* '05, 1, 589; *Bookman,* 21, 188; *Critic,* 46, 479; *Outlook,* 79, 450; *Sat. Rev.,* 99, 709.
Monsieur Beaucaire, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '01, 656.
The Two Vanrevels, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '02, 2, 791; W. M. Payne, *Dial,* 33, 327.

EDITH WHARTON

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

The Greater Inclination, 1899 (Scribner).
The Touchstone, 1900 (Scribner).
Crucial Instances, 1901 (Scribner).
The Valley of Decision, 1902 (Scribner).
Sanctuary, 1903 (Scribner).
The Descent of Man and Other Stories, 1904 (Scribner).
Italian Villas and Their Gardens, 1904 (Century).
Italian Backgrounds, 1905 (Scribner).
The House of Mirth, 1906 (Scribner).
Madame de Treymes, 1907 (Scribner).
The Fruit of the Tree, 1907 (Scribner).
The Hermit and the Wild Woman, 1908 (Scribner).
A Motor-Flight Through France, 1908 (Scribner).
Artemis to Actæon, 1909 (Scribner).

II. CRITICAL ESTIMATES, ETC.

Academy, "Edith Wharton as a Writer," 61, 73.
Book Buyer, "Edith Wharton: Her Use of Epigram," 18, 395.

Dwight, H. G., "The Work of Mrs. Wharton," *Putnam's*, 3, 590.
Nation, "*The Fruit of the Tree* and Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*," 85, 514.
Sedgwick, H. D., "The Novels of Mrs. Wharton," *Atlantic*, 89, 217.
Sholl, A. M., "The Work of Edith Wharton," *Gunton's*, 25, 426.
Waldstein, Prof. Charles, "Social Ideals," *North Amer. Rev.*, 182, 840.

III. SEPARATE REVIEWS

Crucial Instances, reviewed, *Athenæum*, '01, 2, 186.
The Descent of Man, reviewed, *Academy*, 67, 163; *Athenæum*, '04, 2, 13; R. Pyke, *Bookman*, 19, 512; O. H. Dunbar, *Critic*, 45, 127; *Indep.*, 56, 1334; *Reader*, 4, 226; *Scribner*, 35, 313.
The Fruit of the Tree, reviewed, *Athenæum*, '07, 2, 762; *Current Lit.*, 43, 691; *Nation*, 85, 352; *Id.*, *ib.*, 514.
The Greater Inclination, reviewed, *Academy*, 57, 40; A. Gorren, *Critic*, 37, 173.
The Hermit and the Wild Woman, reviewed, *Athenæum*, '08, 2, —.
The House of Mirth, reviewed, *Academy*, 69, 1155; *Athenæum*, '05, 2, 718; *Current Lit.*, 39, 689.
Madame de Treymes, reviewed, *Academy*, 72, 465; *Athenæum*, '07, 1, 535; H. J. Smith, *Atlantic*, 100, 131; Mary Moss, *Bookman*, 25, 303; *Cur. Lit.*, 42, 693; *Indep.*, 62, 1528; *Lit. Dig.*, 34, 640; *Nation*, 84, 313; O. H. Dunbar, *North Amer.*, 185, 218; *Outlook*, 86, 255; *Putnam's*, 2, 616; *Rev. of Rev.*, 35, 764; *Spectator*, 89, 764.
Sanctuary, reviewed, *Athenæum*, '03, 2, 750; Aline Gorren, *Critic*, 44, 269; W. M. Payne, *Dial*, 36, 118; *Nation*, 77, 507.

Tales of Men and Ghosts, reviewed, *Independent,* 69, 1089; *Nation,* 91, 496.

Valley of Decision, reviewed, *Athenæum,* '02, 1, 748; H. W. Boynton, *Atlantic,* 89, 710; G. Hall, *Book Buyer,* 24, 196; *Cath. World,* 75, 422; A. Gorren, *Critic,* 40, 541; F. J. Mather, Jr., *Forum,* 34, 78.

KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

I. PUBLISHED WORKS

The Birds' Christmas Carol, 1888 (Houghton, Mifflin).

The Story of Patsy, 1889 (Houghton, Mifflin).

A Summer in a Cañon, 1889 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Timothy's Quest, 1890 (Houghton, Mifflin).

A Cathedral Courtship, 1893 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Penelope's English Experiences, 1893 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Polly Oliver's Problem, 1893 (Houghton, Mifflin).

The Village Watch Tower, 1895 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Nine Love Songs and a Carol, 1896 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Marm Lisa, 1896 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Penelope's Progress, 1898 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Penelope's Experiences in Ireland, 1901 (Houghton, Mifflin).

The Diary of a Goose Girl, 1902 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm, 1903 (Houghton, Mifflin).

Rose o' the River, 1905 (Houghton, Mifflin).

New Chronicles of Rebecca, 1907 (Houghton, Mifflin).

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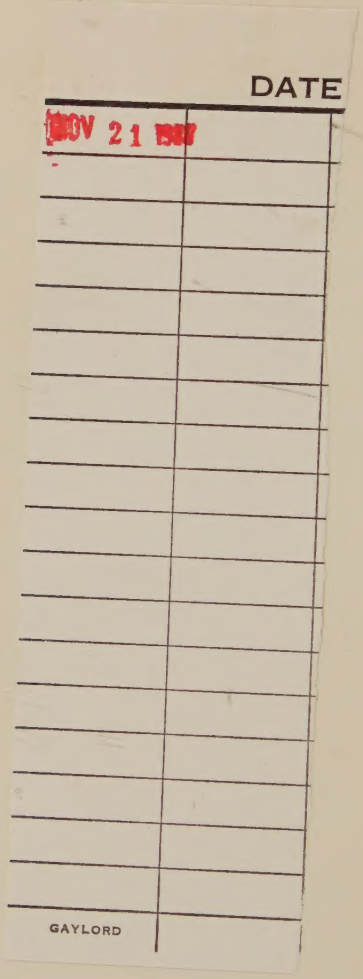

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